“A LITTLE DEVILTRY”: GILDED AGE CELEBRITY AND WILLIAM MERRITT CHASE’S TENTH STREET STUDIO AS ADVERTISEMENT

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DEDICATION

In memory of my uncle Glen
for the trips to the art museum.

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PREFACE

By 1962, Andy Warhol had gained a degree of celebrity as an artist and personality, but he wanted to be more: an icon, an institutionalized brand. So he reinvented his public persona as that of a commercial manufacturer of art products. In sunglasses, a striped t-shirt, and leather pants, he performed the role of the art star – too bored, too cool to answer press questions. This public persona was part of Warhol's attempt to mirror his artwork – also cool and detached, at once critical of and participating in bleak commercialism.[1]

Toward this end, Warhol acquired a large loft on 47th Street in New York City near Grand Central Station in 1963. After a makeover in DuPont aluminum paint, Warhol's new studio achieved fame as "the Factory." The Factory would serve as backdrop for experimental films and as the site of parties that attracted the city's artists, weirdos, celebrities, and wealthy patrons. More importantly, it captured the imagination of the press and the public, cementing Warhol's place at the center of pop culture.[2] Warhol designed a studio that itself became an emblem of Pop art, but more importantly, it helped enhance the celebrity of its creator – an act of marketing genius – but one that had been accomplished by another New York artist almost 100 years earlier.

[1] David Bourdon, *Warhol* (New York: Abradale Press, 1989), 10; Soojin Lee, "The Art and Politics of Artists' Personas," *Persona Studies* 1, no. 1 (2015): 29, accessed July 25, 2020, DOI: https://doi.org/10.21153/ps2015vol1no1art422.
[2] Bourdon, 170-71.

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In the late nineteenth century, the American art world was highly competitive as artists vied with each other and more established European artists for a small pool of patrons. A few recognized the power of mass media to create celebrity and financial success. They tread carefully into the arena of self-promotion, striking a delicate balance between advertising and maintaining Gilded Age ideas about the purely artistic motivations of a great painter.

In 1878, the largely unknown artist William Merritt Chase arrived in New York with the idea that an elaborately decorated studio could potentially make his name in the art world. The plan worked. His Tenth Street Studio was a harmony of color created through his masterful arrangement of bric-a-brac and art objects. It soon attracted media coverage and public attention. Chase quickly realized, however, that the writers who gushed over his studio were more interested in the space than the artist who created it. While the studio had achieved celebrity, its creator had not.

In order to attract patrons, Chase needed to garner press coverage of the studio that would refer back to himself as the artist. His solution was a series of paintings of the studio interior itself. Chase depicted wealthy visitors looking at prints, conferring with the artist, even contemplating a purchase of work right off the walls – messages intended to advertise his availability to these potential patrons. These painted "advertisements," created in the 1880s, redirected public attention from the studio to its creator and solidified his celebrity.

In 1890, Chase painted one of the most famous events to ever occur at the Tenth Street Studio – the performance of the Spanish dancer known as the Carmencita. While encapsulating the bohemian atmosphere of the studio, Chase's portrait of the dancer displayed no trace of the studio or its contents, only a plain muted background. He no longer needed to advertise himself as artist-for-hire because he had already succeeded in this endeavor. His painted studio advertisements had worked. Chase was a bona fide Gilded Age celebrity and a permanent addition to the canon of great American artists.

Nancy Marie Robertson, Ph.D., Chair

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INTRODUCTION

> "Don't worry about telling lies. The most tiresome people – and pictures – are the stupidly truthful ones. I really think I prefer a little deviltry."
> – William Merritt Chase, 1917.[3]

By January 1896, William Merritt Chase's famous studio on Tenth Street stood empty. The artist had cleared out his rooms and sold its cornucopia of art objects at auction. Newspapers from across the country covered the sale, and reporters detailed the abundant bric-a-brac that Chase had collected and displayed for decades. In this manner, the press attention and public interest in the studio's closing mirrored that for its 1878 opening. But in 1896, when the artist disposed of the rooms and their contents, he no longer needed the press that studio events had reliably attracted for over twenty years. Chase had gained entry to the canon of great American artists and secured his legacy. The newspaper articles covering the final days of the Tenth Street Studio demonstrated the ways in which Chase garnered his success.

This thesis starts at the end of the story, with the sources describing the sale of the Tenth Street Studio as opposed to its opening. Articles from the 1890s revealed Chase's tactics for manufacturing celebrity and much about how he became one of the most important artists of America's Gilded Age. The aesthetic clutter amongst which Chase delicately wove his advertising message in his Tenth Street Studio paintings remained fascinating to the public, even as Chase prepared to leave it behind.

In December 1895 and January 1896, well-known art critics and staff reporters for New York newspapers breathlessly detailed the studio's contents. The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* described the "Arabian Nights splendor" of Chase's Tenth Street Studio and described the "sensation" that would be generated through display and sale of the "studio fittings – tapestries, rugs, hangings, bronzes, arms, armor, furniture, porcelains and a collection of finger rings."[4] While almost twenty years had passed since its opening, the studio had lost none of its magic or allure for visitors and readers. The disparate objects, harmoniously displayed, still conjured the cultured bohemia that Chase had created for press attention at the start of his career. In fact, the auction house tried to recreate the way Chase had displayed the objects in the studio in order to draw on the studio's enticing mystique. The

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[3] Frances Lauderbach, "Notes from Talks by William M. Chase," *American Magazine of Art* 8, no. 11 (September 1917): 436, accessed July 25, 2020, Google Books.
[4] "Gallery and Studio," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, December 1, 1895, 21, accessed August 2, 2020, Newspapers.com.

Brooklyn Daily Eagle reported, "The effect of placing these treasures in something like calculated disorder of a studio much enhances their beauty."[5] The *Sun* claimed that it would be "next to impossible to describe the particular pieces of note in a collection numbering nearly 1,800 items in the catalogue," but most major newspapers tried anyway. [6] For example, while the *Sun* thought it was "hopeless " to describe "so various an aggregation of artistical junk," the newspaper still listed the categories of bric-a-brac, including "antique glassware, lanterns and lamps, old Spanish and Italian locks, a few curiously bound books, mostly of German workmanship; musical instruments, Japanese, Chinese, Turkish, German, African, Indian, and American; Indian trappings, Japanese, Persian, Spanish, Moorish, and Italian wares and potteries, Javanese curios, Spanish bridles and trappings, shoes from foreign lands, costumes of other days and countries, hangings, tapestries, draperies, rugs, old furniture and clocks, cushions, ancient picture frames" and more.[7] Other newspapers went into even greater detail and many included illustrations of the items in the studio.

Such articles were similar to those published twenty years earlier, at the studio's opening, in that the authors couldn't resist detailing the studio curios. But there was one important difference. While newspaper articles in 1878 focused completely on the studio and its contents and ignored the artist and his work, newspaper articles in the 1890s gushed over the success of the artist, described his artwork and style, and speculated on the next phase of his career. For example, in 1895, the writer and critic John Gilmer Speed began his lengthy article on the studio sale with a complete biography of Chase, his education, rise in the art scene, role in leading major organizations, and contributions to the nation's art education. Speed praised Chase's productivity, technical virtuosity, and "canvasses almost bewildering in their variety."[8] Speed's descriptions of the studio included not just listing of the *objets d'art*, but also well-known events coordinated by Chase that took place there. The writer noted that "for many years past the studio of Mr. William M. Chase, in West Tenth Street, New York, had been one of the notable places of the metropolis" and described the high standing Chase had achieved in the art world.[9] Speed

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[5] "Gallery and Studio," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 5, 1896, 22, accessed August 2, 2020, Newspapers.com.
[6] "Mr. Chase's Bric-A-Brac," *Sun* (New York, NY), January 3, 1896, 7, accessed August 3, 2020, Newspapers.com.
[7] Ibid.
[8] JNO Gilmer Speed, "Chase's Famous Studio," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, New York) December 22, 1895, 9, accessed August 2, 2020, Newspapers.com.
[9] Ibid.

wrote, "His career has been most notable and one need have no hesitation in saying that he has worked more effectively for the advancement of art in America than any other ten men of his day or of any other day."[10] Even the title of this 1895 article, "Chase's Famous Studio," gave equal weight to artist and studio.[11]

During December 1895 and January 1896, while the sale continued, the press described Chase's status among the artistic elite and noted, if indirectly, the link between his success and the fame of the studio. For example, the *New York Times* reported the basic information about the sale, but also linked Chase's aesthetic statement with his ascendancy in the art world:

> Artistically arranged at the American Art Galleries, the profusion and quality of the collection that for so many years has made Mr. Chase's studio the ideal workshop of a painter show that taste and opportunity may accomplish in the selection of bric-a-brac, pictures, and the many odds and ends with which a man of keen aesthetic sense loves to surround himself.[12]

The article went on to explain that while Chase had long relied on teaching to make ends meet, he was, by this point, successful enough and well-known enough to make a living off of painting alone. The *Times* reported, "Mr. Chase has been a powerful factor in the art of this country for almost twenty years . . . . [He] now announced his intention to abandon teaching and confine himself to portrait painting, and composition work."[13] Likewise, the *Democrat and Chronicle* reported "Now in the ripeness of his powers as a painter he wishes to stop teaching and devote his time exclusively to original work."[14] Chase no longer needed to teach; he was completely established as a painter.

While such descriptions show that these experts and critics saw that there was a link between the way the studio had captured the public's imagination and the artistic success of its creator, none detailed how this happened. How did William Merritt Chase use his carefully arranged studio to create celebrity and generate success in the art world? These late-nineteenth-century articles noted the cause without examining the effect. Later critics, historians, and museum curators have largely done the same with a few exceptions. For example, in his 2001 article for *Smithsonian Magazine*, journalist and art historian

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[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] "In the World of Art," *New York Times*, January 5, 1896, 21, accessed August 2, 2020, New York Times Article Archive.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Speed, "Chase's Famous Studio, 9."

Stanley Meisler made perhaps the most direct statement on the relationship between the studio and the celebrity. Meisler wrote:

> Will Chase, as he was known, soon made a prominent place for himself in the art establishment of the city. He was congenial, popular and talented, lauded by critics, respected by students and admired by colleagues . . . . But it was his studio that made Chase a celebrity.[15]

Meisler and other critics and historians who have noted the connection between the Tenth Street Studio and Chase's celebrity, have not yet fully explained how the studio contributed to the artist's renown. This thesis fills this gap between cause and effect by analyzing the ways in which Chase leveraged his studio to create his own celebrity as an artist.

Significance

Celebrity is not a modern phenomenon, nor is it simply a product of modernization. It was long portrayed and accepted as such because it had mainly been studied by cultural theorists, not historians. The historians who have ventured into the field, and whose work will be discussed in the historiography section of this thesis, have found that the concept of celebrity began well before the twentieth century and may have bloomed even in the ancient world. As the field grows slowly, historians are reevaluating the relationship of celebrity to culture. Historian of celebrity, Simon Morgan wrote in 2010: "By stimulating the production of consumer goods, printed images and periodical literature, celebrity played a crucial role in the growth of the public sphere, the emergence of consumer society and the global expansion of western culture."[16] Thus, historians are finding that celebrity was not just a product of modernizing culture, but a shaping force in the modernization process.

A study of Gilded Age American art is an ideal subject area for furthering the study of celebrity. Artists and art influences, especially the Aesthetic Movement, were directly driving increased consumption of goods, images, and periodicals.[17] At the same time, urbanization, industrialization, increased literacy and leisure time, and the rise of the mass media increased the number of people consuming art, art literature, and art objects. For the first time in history, the American artist could capture a mass audience through the press

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[15] Stanley Meisler, "William Merritt Chase," *Smithsonian Magazine* (February 1, 2001), accessed July 25, 2020, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/william-merritt-chase-71963962/.

[16] Simon Morgan, "Historicizing Celebrity," *Celebrity Studies* 1, no. 3 (November 2010): 367, accessed July 25, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2010.511485.

[17] See the section "Aesthetic Movement as Avenue for Self-Promotion" in Chapter Two for a definition and discussion of the Aesthetic Movement.

and gain celebrity. The art celebrity, in turn, influenced the taste and consumption of a mass audience, changing popular American culture.

The brilliance of William Merritt Chase, beyond the canvas, lay in his recognition of the power of the media in influencing the public and his ability to manipulate that outlet for his own self-promotion. Everything from his clothing to his parties was carefully calculated to advertise his role as the always genteel, slightly bohemian master American artist. The greatest and most outlandish examples of his self-promotion will be explored in this thesis. As there is very little scholarship on celebrity of nineteenth-century artists, this undertaking could help add to the larger historiography.

Methodology and Organization

This thesis is divided into four chapters that contribute to the scholarship on nineteenth-century celebrity through the study of William Merritt Chase, his artwork, his studio, and his genius for advertising and promotion. Since little has been written on the celebrity of artists in the nineteenth century, this thesis opens with the historiographies of advertising, taste, and literary celebrity in conversation with primary and secondary sources on Chase, his studio, and the American Gilded Age art world. This historiographical section establishes the terminology and theory of celebrity and lays the groundwork for later chapters. It also conveys the significance of this study in contributing to the wider scholarship on celebrity.

Chapter Two establishes important context for understanding the struggles and opportunities of an American artist in the Gilded Age. The rise of mass media, art journalism, and the human-interest story created a platform for a strong personality to attract attention. Authors and artists of the late nineteenth century used these outlets as vehicles for self-promotion. They used opportunities provided by the Aesthetic Movement to make themselves of interest to the press. While the country was in the thrall of this movement, the aesthetically designed interior garnered much media coverage. Young William Merritt Chase, struggling to survive in a competitive art climate, imagined that the perfectly curated studio interior would capture the attention of the press and potential patrons. It was a large gamble, but one that paid off – after he learned how to promote it.

Chapter Three examines the press coverage Chase earned through his creation of an aesthetic interior that tapped into the contemporary consciousness. Art journals and newspapers established the Tenth Street Studio as a manifestation of genius and a tangible

bohemia where people could escape from the demands of the everyday. Chase was able to extend the media coverage of the studio through publicity stunts (such as filling a boat with the studio contents for a trip with the Tile Club down the Hudson River). By the early 1880s, Chase realized that the studio had achieved celebrity, but its creator had not, and he continued to struggle financially. In order to attract patrons, he needed to attract press coverage of the studio that would refer back to himself as artist.

Chapter Four argues that the paintings Chase made of his studio were advertisements for him as an artist-for-hire. Since his studio was famous, and images of it would guarantee media coverage, he simply painted it, but also included messages to the viewer advertising his commercial availability. In these artworks from the 1880s, Chase struck a delicate balance between advertising himself and maintaining Gilded Age ideas about the purely artistic motivations of genius artists. These paintings redirected public attention from the studio to its creator and solidified his celebrity. This chapter looks in depth at five paintings in which Chase depicted wealthy visitors in his studio looking at prints, conferring with the artist, even contemplating a purchase of a work right off the walls – messages intended to advertise his availability to these potential patrons. This chapter also looks at modern Chase scholars and their interpretations of these works, while arguing for a more clear-cut understanding of Chase's motivations. Chase's paintings of the Tenth Street Studio advertised his artistic talent, grew his celebrity, and played a key role in establishing his lasting renown.

The Conclusion, in addition to summarizing the main arguments of this thesis, analyzes perhaps the most famous painting of Chase's time at Tenth Street, *Carmencita* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1890). While completely encapsulating the bohemian atmosphere of the studio, this portrait of a Spanish dancer displayed no trace of the studio or its contents. Chase included no bric-a-brac, no visitors examining paintings, and no representation of the artist. He no longer needed to advertise the studio or himself as artist-for-hire precisely because he had already succeeded in this endeavor. His painted studio advertisements had worked. By the 1890s, Chase was a bona fide Gilded Age celebrity and a permanent addition to the canon of great American artists.

CHAPTER ONE: HISTORIOGRAPHY

> "Our public, in so far as it cares for the artist at all, cares only for his personality . . . . It gives little heed to his ideas, and less to his expression of them." – Henry Blake Fuller, 1899.[18]

Writing a historiography on the celebrity of a Gilded Age American artist is neither simple, nor straightforward. There is no foundational work dealing with celebrity in the nineteenth-century American art world.[19] Existing histories of celebrity, which generally gloss over the pre-twentieth century, are helpful with terminology, but not always adequate for direct application. Historians and literary scholars have created a sizable body of work on the celebrity of authors, which can be applied to the art world in some cases. A narrow collection of journal articles and books dealing with artistic identity are available for context. Sara Burns's *Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in the Gilded Age*, a history of late nineteenth-century American art, has served as the most directly relevant work for this thesis. In order to analyze the importance of William Merritt Chase as artist, self-promoter, and celebrity, I have placed the scholarship of Burns and other historians of Gilded Age American art in conversation with the ideas of historians and theorists of celebrity, and, to some extent, more esoteric conceptions of culture, taste, and class. Thus, this is a historiography of celebrity, drawing on works on artistic identity and informed by broad cultural theories.

Celebrity is not easily defined, much less quantified or historicized. Therefore, the historiography of celebrity studies is spread over diverse subject areas. Cultural theorists undertook the earliest examinations of celebrity in the 1960s and 1970s. Historians have become interested in the study of celebrity only recently, with works historicizing celebrity appearing in the 1990s and 2000s. The launch of the scholarly journal *Celebrity Studies* in 2012 shows that broad interest in celebrity studies is a relatively new phenomenon. While the body of scholarship has increased significantly in the last decade, there is still no quintessential history of celebrity, much less one on art celebrity.

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[18] Henry Blake Fuller, "Art in America," *Bookman* 10 (November 1899): 218, accessed July 25, 2020, Hathi Trust Digital Library.

[19] British historiography includes many more examples of studies of artists and the creation of celebrity. See, for example, Martin Postle's monograph on the eighteenth-century English portrait painter Joshua Reynold's creation of his own celebrity: Martin Postle, ed., Joshua Reynolds: The Creation of Celebrity (London, UK: Tate Publishing, 2005).

According to a 2010 essay by cultural studies professor Simon Morgan, this dearth of scholarship exists because historians are still assuming that celebrity is a product of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. They are afraid to apply the canon of cultural theories to pre-twentieth-century celebrity anachronistically.[20] Thus, historians willing to examine the rise of the nineteenth-century celebrity are contributing to a greater understanding of this cultural phenomenon.

This historiography begins by identifying and discussing the cultural theories that established the foundation of celebrity studies and by defining many of the terms used throughout the thesis. It continues with a look at the intersection of celebrity and media, the changing nature of fame throughout history, and the establishment of the field of celebrity studies. The chapter progresses into an analysis of works on literary celebrity, as these sources' arguments are adapted for discussions of art celebrity later in this thesis. The chapter concludes with an examination of existing scholarship on William Merritt Chase.

Cultural Theory

Cultural theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault, along with historian Daniel Boorstin, initiated the study of the intersection of taste and class with "well-knownness."[21] It is worth starting with Foucault as his essay "What Is An Author?" inspired the final chapter and colored the main argument of this thesis. In several of his works, Foucault maintained that no canon of beliefs or set of facts is inherently or transcendentally true or correct. And Foucault is known for breaking down historically accepted explanations for cultural institutions or phenomena to analyze the relationships of ideas to power. Scholars of celebrity studies would agree that celebrities have a great influence over the public and thus cultural power, but most view celebrity as a product of the twentieth century. Foucault would encourage a historical dismantling of this concept. In looking further into our past, it becomes clear that the relationship between the celebrity and the media of the nineteenth century had enormous power over American society in a period of demographic and cultural change. Celebrity then is worthy of dissecting as an influencer of culture as opposed to simply a byproduct.

In his 1969 essay "What Is An Author?" Foucault refused to accept the idea of the author as a concept that has existed for all time and for all types of writing. He noted that for

[20] Morgan, 366-67.
[21] Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (1961; reprint: New York: Vintage Books, 2012), 57.

thousands of years people listened to folk tales with no author and that most people do not wonder who authored many important written works, such as the periodic table of elements. It was authors, themselves, who invented the knowable author by creating a "relationship between an author and a text, the manner in which a text apparently points to this figure who is outside and precedes it."[22] Furthermore, an author could place so many markers of the self into a text that the text itself (and related texts) became Marxist, Shakespearean, or Kafkaesque. Foucault's thinking provides a framework for "reading" William Merritt Chase's creation of his Tenth Street Studio. Chase learned to "write" his studio in such a way that any mention or depiction of the studio in a newspaper article referred to the artist himself. Chase's paintings of his studio overflowed with markers pointing back to himself, his role as artist, and the commercial availability of his services. The studio paintings became a sort of indirect self-portrait, with the author-painter never referring to himself directly, but instead making the reader wonder: To whom does this work refer? Chapter Four will explore this idea more completely and combine this analytic model with scholarship on nineteenth-century advertising.

The French sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu also influenced the framework for this thesis on celebrity. In his ambitious and influential work *Distinction: A Social Critique on the Judgment of Taste*, Bourdieu unintentionally laid the foundation for celebrity studies by showing the power that taste has over class structure. He argued that all people making aesthetic choices have ulterior motives. While taste and cultural consumption are a group of choices, they are also an "aesthetic outlook" that advertises and impose class.[23] According to Bourdieu, there is real power in aesthetic choices. He argued, in part, that taste reinforces the value of the upper class and sets the aesthetic judge apart as "distinct" from the masses whose power and social status is diminished.[24] The scholarship on the relationship between art and taste stretches all the way back to Plato, Hume, and, perhaps most influentially, Kant's *Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. In this work, Kant argued for beauty as an aesthetic judgment based on subjective feeling, as opposed to an

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[22] Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault,* ed. Donald F. Boucard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 113-138. According to Boucard, Foucault's "What Is an Author?" first appeared in a French philosophy journal in 1969.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1979; reprint: Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), *passim*. This work was originally published in French in 1979.

inherent value in the object deemed beautiful. While influential, Kant's theories had ignored the economic and class issues that Bourdieu would place front and center. This thesis draws on Bourdieu's ideas about aesthetic choices as social power in relation to Chase's role in the Aesthetic Movement and that movement's inherent issues of class and taste.

Daniel J. Boorstin wrote directly about celebrity and examined the phenomenon historically as well as theoretically. In his influential 1961 work, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America,* Boorstin introduced ideas about the pseudo-event as an incident manufactured to garner the attention of the mass media, and about the celebrity as "a person who is known for his well-knownness."[25] I have included Boorstin, generally regarded as a conservative American historian, among the cultural theorists in this historiography, only in regard to *The Image*, which differs from his other work by pointedly forwarding a social theory on celebrity.

According to Boorstin, by the mid-nineteenth century, organic events began to be replaced with synthesized happenings referred to as "pseudo-events," which were created primarily for the purpose of being reported. The early American newsman's task was simply to report the events of providence. By the 1850s, publishers recognized that items of interest sold more newspapers, and reporters worked to create a compelling story even when lacking a tangible happening.[26] Pseudo-events could also be marketing ploys. Through promotion or self-promotion, a person or institution could achieve its desired goal without actually affecting change. The approach snowballed. Boorstin wrote, "Pseudo-events . . . aroused new hunger in the very act of satisfying it."[27] As people came to think of staged and synthetic happenings as important events, the demand for a constant stream of new, novel, or inside information increased.

Boorstin argued that the nineteenth-century shift from the God-made event to the man-made one was paralleled by a shift from the hero to the celebrity. Before the nineteenth century, the great man and the famous man were the same person.[28] Their fame was made slowly and lasted because it required a lifetime of deeds to create. The demand for pseudo-events, by contrast, provided the means for generating fame overnight – often an artificial fame mistaken for greatness, better known as celebrity.[29] After this cultural

[25] Boorstin, 57.
[26] Ibid., 7-13.
[27] Ibid., 38-9.
[28] Ibid., 46.
[29] Ibid., 46-8.

shift, heroes had to become celebrities to survive. Even the great statesman or master painter had to take on the guise of the celebrity. While a heroic deed or the creation of a masterpiece was an authentic experience, the press transformed it into a pseudo-event and the person into a celebrity.[30]

While later historians of celebrity, who will be discussed later in this chapter, have largely rejected Boorstin's view of celebrity as a purely modern creation devolved from heroism, they continue to draw on and expand on his idea of the pseudo-event. This study of William Merritt Chase will add to this scholarship on the use of the pseudo-event for self-promotion and the creation of celebrity. In the Gilded Age, an artist survived only by being known, and could create further masterful works only through commissions from patrons. Thus, remaining a celebrity was essential. The vehicle for maintaining celebrity was the media and the vehicle for attracting the media was the pseudo-event. The following chapters show William Merritt Chase as a master manipulator of the pseudo-event and perhaps the period's most self-aware celebrity artist.

Celebrity Studies

The field of celebrity studies is growing. According to James Bennett's 2012 essay "Historicising Celebrity Studies," it is a fairly new field, but one with roots in a range of disciplines, including cultural studies, mass communications, sociology, and film studies.[31] As previously mentioned, there is not a fundamental work on celebrity in the American art world. However, this thesis benefits from two areas of scholarship: studies of the relationship between celebrity and the media and studies of literary celebrity. The works of sociology and film studies proved less useful. Bennett explained that sociologists and film scholars treat celebrity as "a product of late modernity" and obscure those examples of celebrity and sources established before the mid-twentieth century.[32] The sources valued most by Bennett are those on celebrity and the media, several of which contribute to this thesis. Most of these studies respond to Boorstin's aforementioned work which Bennett called "the touchstone of celebrity studies."[33]

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[30] Ibid., 62-6.
[31] James Bennett, "Historicising Celebrity Studies," *Celebrity Studies* 1, no. 3 (2012): 358-9, accessed July 25, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2010.511141.
[32] Ibid., 358.
[33] Ibid.

Celebrity and Media

In his 1986 work, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History*, Leo Braudy complicated Boorstin's dismissal of the celebrity as little more than superficial spectacle by undertaking an historical survey of the effects of changing political structures and advancing technology, namely the rise of the mass media. Braudy's expansive historical approach demonstrated that the desire to be recognized has always been one of the "prime social emotions."[34] Braudy traced the history of fame, or "the changing ways by which individuals have sought to bring themselves to the attention of others" in order to gain power, back to the ancients Greeks and Romans, and found that "from the beginning fame has required publicity."[35] While the method of communication has changed and expanded the definition of fame, the basic force has remained the same through the ages. The ancients used theater and monuments, the Renaissance saw the spread of painting and engraving, and the twentieth century brought radio, television, and the internet. With the increased exposure of modernizing technology, Braudy argued that the nature of fame had changed and become less permanent. The temporary fame of the twentieth century could be attributed to uniqueness, but "in part it requires that uniqueness be exemplary and reproducible." [36] The modern public increasingly wanted fame to seem imitable and achievable by them.

Braudy explored several of these complex paradoxes of fame. For example, the person seeking fame, and thus recognition of their achievements or uniqueness, was required to manufacture a story for the media designed for public consumption. That manufactured image then dwarfed the actual person behind the fame, obscured their uniqueness or achievements, and undermined the self who sought recognition.[37] As this thesis will argue, for artists, this often meant that interest in their public personality overshadowed their work. The Gilded Age novelist Henry Blake Fuller complained in 1899: "Our public, in so far as it cares for the artist at all, cares only for his personality . . . . It gives little heed to his ideas, and less to his expression of them."[38] The public came to value personality and celebrity over the person and his work. Yet Braudy did not dismiss

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[34] Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 16.
[35] Ibid., 3
[36] Ibid., 3-12. I use the term "temporary fame here" as Braudy did not use the term "celebrity" extensively.
[37] Ibid., 115-180.
[38] Fuller, 218.

celebrity, even with its bleak outcome for the famous person. He respected the desire for renown as a motivating factor behind many great achievements. Even those modern celebrities with dubious, debatable achievements, he explained, could be "vehicles of cultural memory and cohesion."[39] Those people known to the public provide a kind of common language with which to analyze society. They also provide hope in a complex world, a kind of "liberation from powerless anonymity" in an increasingly urbanized and unfamiliar world.[40]

This change in the nature of fame, its audience, and method of conveyance took place over thousands of years and not until the final chapter of this roughly 600-page book did Braudy address the "democratization of fame" in the United States.[41] In it, Braudy concluded, "In every era and culture of the West since the classical age, fame has been a complex word into which is loaded much that is deeply believed about the nature of the individual, the social world, and whatever exists beyond both."[42] Most importantly perhaps, his focus on the importance of technology and communications to creating fame inspired a number of historians to look closer at the relationship between media and celebrity.[43]

In her 1992 article, "Media and the Rise of Celebrity Culture," historian Amy Henderson analyzed media and celebrity and shed light on the cultural climate required to create celebrity in the Gilded Age United States.[44] While Henderson's essay responded to and historicized Boorstin's theories on celebrity, drawing on several cultural histories of American society, her most relevant contribution may have been her attention to the effects of urbanization and immigration, as well as the resulting desire for cultural hegemony (by a mainly white, Protestant upper and expanding middle class), on the phenomenon of celebrity. Henderson argued that the shift from the fame of the military hero to the celebrity of the movie star paralleled cultural shifts brought about by technological improvements in communication and increasing urbanization and immigration during the Gilded Age through the Progressive Era. The shift from hero to celebrity itself was a product of the nation's need for a cohesive identity and collective narrative.[45]

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[39] Ibid., 15.
[40] Ibid., 7-15.
[41] Ibid., 315.
[42] Ibid., 585.
[43] Ibid., 315-331.
[44] Amy Henderson, "Media and the Rise of Celebrity Culture, *OAH Magazine* 6, no. 4 (Spring 1992): 49-54, accessed July 25, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1093/maghis/6.4.49.
[45] Ibid.

Henderson lent credence to Boorstin's conclusion that the face of fame changed from the hero who earned his reputation through deeds to the celebrity persona who was well-known for his "well-knownness."[46] Henderson argued that the heroes of the revolutionary United States were chosen to give the citizens of the young nation "a sense of historical legitimacy."[47] George Washington and the other founding fathers became symbols of virtue and strength, identified as "gentleman, scholars, and patriots" representing church, government, and military institutions.[48] According to Henderson, the next several generations sought to construct a national narrative starring an "epic protagonist" espousing the qualities of "self-reliance, virtue, and industry" in this "quest for national legitimacy."[49] This archetype remained unchanged through the Civil War period when Abraham Lincoln, "plain man of the people," came to represent for many "the simple genuine self against the whole world."[50] Again Henderson agreed with Boorstin in determining why and how the nature of fame changed in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. During the communications revolution (Boorstin's "graphic revolution"), technological improvements made possible the rapid growth of mass media and changed how Americans received information and expanded the popular imagination. Growing literacy rates, increased leisure time, and access to image-filled magazines changed the public's definition of fame and success. Self-made men like inventors and industry leaders became the new heroes. J. P. Morgan and John D. Rockefeller "were idolized for fighting their way to Darwinian peaks of capitalism."[51] Almost as soon as the "genteel tradition" that represented the national identity during the Gilded Age was established, it was melted down and recast.[52]

The impetus for a new national identity was the twenty-three million immigrants arriving between 1870 and 1920 in East Coast American cities. According to Henderson, mass immigration and urbanization created a "vernacular culture" which sought a new expression of identity through the entertainment industry. People from all classes were fascinated with entertainers. The newspaper and magazine industries kept them supplied

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[46] Boorstin, 57.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Henderson, 49.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid. Henderson quoted Ralph Waldo Emerson to describe Lincoln.
[51] Ibid., 50.
[52] Ibid. On the dissolution of this genteel national identity, Henderson drew on journalist William Allen White's 1944 autobiography.

with the desired information and the stars of stage became celebrities. Attention shifted from the person who achieved fame to the person who was most visible in the media. Henderson argued that this rise of the celebrity-consuming culture paralleled the country's own shift from a producing society to a consuming one during the late nineteenth century. Henderson referred to Warren Susman's 1984 essay, "'Personality' and the Making of Twentieth Century Culture," in arguing that this shift to a consuming society resulted in "a culture of personality."[53] In other words, a self-aware and consciously crafted persona became a way to attract media attention and stand out from the masses. This desire to stand out came from the upper and middle classes who felt threatened by the great influx of immigrants.[54] Fearful of change, upper- and middle-class American culture "tilted inward," away from character and achievement, and toward personality and self-aggrandizement.[55] As American culture fixated on personality, celebrity became its measure of success.[56]

In his 2002 monograph, *Self-Exposure: Human Interest Journalism and the Emergence of Celebrity in America, 1890-1940*, Charles L. Ponce de Leon argued that the relationship between American democratic values, the rise of the mass media, and an expanding market economy shaped celebrity, drawing on ideas set forth by Braudy and Boorstin. Ponce de Leon described the self-made celebrity, giving agency to both the press and the celebrity himself. He argued for the importance of an historical look at celebrity and challenged critics of the field of study. According to Ponce de Leon, criticism of the American obsession with celebrity abounds due to the perception that it is a symptom of a trend toward the superficial and transient. Such criticism is ignorant of the history of the development of celebrity, which gives insight into both an important cultural phenomenon and the context that created it. Celebrity is a direct product of the rise of the market economy and democratic values. Modern society encourages self-invention and upward mobility, but the idea that one can re-invent himself creates a distrust of images and

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[53] Ibid. Henderson cited Warren Susman, "'Personality' and the Making of Twentieth Century Culture," *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon, 1984).
[54] Ibid. Henderson cited cultural historian Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).
[55] Ibid., 50-51.
[56] Henderson continued tracing the rise of celebrity through the centralization of the entertainment industry in New York at the turn of the twentieth century, through the popularization of film and the glamour of 1920s and 30s Hollywood, up to the reign of television beginning in the 1950s. The rest of her argument is excluded here because it is outside the time period relevant to a discussion of Chase's work.

destroys authenticity. The mass media not only creates celebrity by bringing certain individuals to the public's attention, but it also tries to present an authentic-seeming image of that celebrity. It purports to deliver the inside look and expose the "real" person behind the image. The media creates celebrities, but the celebrities are no mere pawns of the press. Instead, they actively generate media interest through the creation of a carefully crafted persona.[57] Ponce de Leon agreed with Boorstin that the key to understanding celebrity is through the recognition of the role of the media in this process. Only the media can create a celebrity by providing the visibility needed to stand out from the masses. But Ponce de Leon differed from Boorstin on a key point. When studied from an historical perspective, "the appropriate distinction is not between celebrity and heroism, as Boorstin would have it, but between celebrity and its pre-modern antecedent, fame," according to Ponce de Leon.[58] The late-nineteenth-century media then began creating an image of the celebrity by focusing on his personality – a personality that would be familiar and relatable to the average person. By the turn of the twentieth century, celebrity replaced fame.

Ponce de Leon also drew on Braudy's work in defining celebrity as a democratization of fame. Ponce de Leon agreed with Braudy's argument that innovations in printing, growing literacy, and American democracy modernized fame by creating, not a hero with a lifetime of extraordinary and non-relatable achievements, but instead a talented, but otherwise normal person presented to the public by the media.[59] Ponce de Leon convincingly fused Braudy's historical look at celebrity with sociologist Jürgen Habermas's theory of the "bourgeois public sphere."[60] Habermas argued that, starting in Europe in the late eighteenth century, newspapers and pamphlets included gossip and other contested information about the elite ruling class. These sources of information, unremarkable individually, combined to form a realm of ideas separate from state-sanctioned information. In this realm, or public sphere, individuals could express their own views and initiate debate. Ponce de Leon argued that this public sphere created new avenues toward visibility. Individuals could use the public sphere, that is, the emerging

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[57] Charles L. Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure: Human Interest Journalism and the Emergence of Celebrity in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), *passim*.
[58] Ibid., 13.
[59] Ibid., 16.
[60] Ibid. Braudy cited Jürgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere" in *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, edited by Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 398-404.

mass media, to promote their causes or simply themselves. According to Ponce de Leon, "Within the public sphere individuals became 'public figures,' a category that owed more to their visibility and ability to attract publicity than to their achievements or pedigree."[61] As the public sphere grew, so did opportunities to become known. Thus, almost anyone with the ability to attract press could become famous, resulting in the democratization of fame.

This increased opportunity for visibility changed the way people thought about how to present themselves in public. Ambitious men and women became "authors" of their own persona. In some cases, this was quite literal. According to Ponce de Leon, men like Benjamin Franklin and Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote autobiographies that costumed a "concern for reputation and performance" in the guise of presenting an intimate revelation of the "real" self.[62] A theme of eighteenth-century biographies and autobiographies was the presentation of the subject not as a god-like hero, but as an exemplary, self-made man of character, implying that anyone could reach this status through application. The ability to create a version of self that was both flattering and seemingly authentic became even more important in the following century.

Nineteenth-century biographies presented the self-made man and the morally pure, pious woman as examples of achievement – as a goal that could be reached by the reader. The purpose of such widely read biographies, according to Ponce de Leon, was to create cultural hegemony. A side effect of this approach was the stripping of the biography's subject of the awe and mystery enjoyed by heroic figures of the past. Where the hero was great, the celebrity was simply interesting – and open to evaluation and questioning. The need felt by many for the encouragement of cultural hegemony, and thus the reason for the creation of the nineteenth century's version of celebrity, was a direct result of modernization. Here, Ponce de Leon drew on Henderson's ideas about the effect of immigration and urbanization on celebrity. He agreed that the spread of a market economy upset traditional ways of living. People moved en masse to cities and began working as wage-laborers. The city was "a world of strangers," but such anonymity also presented an opportunity to create an identity.[63]

In 2010, *Celebrity Studies*, the first peer-reviewed academic journal presenting a "critical exploration of celebrity, stardom and fame" began publishing in the United

[61] Ponce de Leon, 18.
[62] Ibid., 19-20.
[63] Ibid.

Kingdom. [64] In the first issue, the editor announced that the journal's goal was "to make sense of celebrity by drawing upon a range of (inter)disciplinary approaches, media forms, historical periods and national contexts."[65] While almost all of the contributors focused on modern celebrity, a few took an historical approach.

In a 2010 essay in *Celebrity Studies*, British scholar Simon Morgan published a call to arms of sort, encouraging the "historicizing [of] celebrity studies."[66] Morgan wrote that historians were just beginning to look more liberally at historical topics through the lens of celebrity, having been hindered by fear of applying what has mainly (and incorrectly) been thought of as a post-twentieth-century concept to earlier periods. Morgan noted that historians had mainly delved into concepts of celebrity in the eighteenth and nineteenth century when writing biographies. They were making valuable contributions to the field through examination of "the extent to which their subject's celebrity status was the result of a deliberate process of self-promotion and media manipulation."[67] According to Morgan, many of these biographies suffer because their authors cite theorists who do not look at how celebrity functioned within the context of their subject's larger period. He specifically cited Boorstin and Braudy for this error. Morgan wrote, "Many contemporary theorists . . . assume that celebrity is essentially a twentieth-century phenomenon, and have paid little attention to historical celebrity cultures. Even those who have considered the historical context have largely been concerned with tracing the antecedents of celebrity's contemporary manifestation, which is too easily assumed to be in its definitive form."[68] Theorists who do not historicize their subjects are prone to reading about the celebrity of the past as an inevitable forbearer of today's celebrity. Morgan also criticized theorists who focus exclusively on literature and ignore other cultural influencers such as the elite classes or the government. He wrote that a historicized scholarship on celebrity would not only give theorists a more complete understanding of contemporary celebrity, but also "challenge the notion that contemporary celebrity is in itself unique, rather than being the unique configuration of a cultural and economic phenomenon that has occurred in many

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[64] Su Holmes and Sean Redmond, "A Journal in Celebrity Studies," *Celebrity Studies* 1, no. 1 (March 2010): 1-10, accessed July 25, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1080/19392390903519016.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Morgan, 366-368.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid., 366.

other times and places."[69] Most importantly, Morgan hoped more historians would see celebrity as an historical concept worth looking into as a modernizing force. Celebrity played an essential role in creating a consumer society and spreading cultural ideas by stimulating a demand for mass media and consumer goods.[70]

Literary Celebrity

While other historians have been reluctant to apply celebrity studies to their areas of expertise, literary historians have created a body of scholarship examining the fame of authors through biography and monographs. The majority of these historians also treat celebrity as a twentieth-century construct, but are still worth examining for their use of celebrity as a framework for better understanding authors. More importantly, many of their conclusions about celebrity authors can be applied to visual artists as well. Their scholarship also contributes theories on issues of high versus low art that are relevant to this study of a fine artist in a market economy.

In *Star Authors: Literary Celebrity in America* (2000), historian Joe Moran applied several cultural theories to the study of the celebrity author. According to Moran, the expanding mass media "individualized" the author by using his personality for promotional ends.[71] As literature became a more marketable commodity in the mid-nineteenth century, the author's real personality became inseparable from the one created for him by advertising and publicity campaigns. As media funded by advertising grew to reach more and more people, a "cult of literary personality" arose around star authors.[72] Appearances by authors like Oscar Wilde attracted enormous crowds in the United States almost overnight, lowing less to the popularity of their published books, and more to feature stories focused on their manufactured personalities presented by the popular press. Mark Twain often appeared at his public readings in a recognizable white, three-piece suit, and performed a "carbon copy of the blunt, coarse, iconoclastic figure presented in his work." [73] Authors that were successful on the lecture circuit did not just read from their books, they performed – both the work and their personality.

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[69] Ibid., 366-67.
[70] Ibid., 367.
[71] Joe Moran, *Star Authors: Literary Celebrity in America* (London, UK: Pluto Press, 2000), 15-19.
[72] Ibid., 16.
[73] Ibid., 17-18.

According to Moran, the relationship between coverage in mass media and the public's desire to view or interact with a celebrity in person is an example of the "intertextuality of celebrity."[74] In other words, media representations simultaneously reinforced the person's fame and created a desire to see the "real" thing. Images of celebrities generated a craving for more information about them. In this way, the celebrity personality as represented by mass media became a marketable commodity that could also be applied to sell a product. The main product was the celebrity himself, whom the public saw as authentic. This product was created by associating the image with the persona and was used by the celebrity in his or her commercial endeavors.[75] As different media outlets fed off each other and generated more interest in the celebrity, they, in turn, created a specific idea about what that celebrity should be. They created the definition of an author, or an artist, or an actor. In the Gilded Age this idea of celebrity was constrained mainly to white, privileged men of the northeastern United States. Nonetheless, the public often assumed celebrity to be a product of a collective national consciousness and a reflection of national identity.[76] Perhaps most relevant to this thesis's focus on art celebrity are Moran's ideas about the relationship between mass media and high culture. Moran argued that while the mainstream press was motivated by profit, it attempted to popularize high culture. The Gilded Age saw a nationalistic movement for cultural and moral uplift depicted by the media to be achievable through the arts. The press advocated for and exploited this "cult of self-improvement," which benefited from increased literacy, better education, and a growing middle class.[77] In later chapters, this public desire to embrace high culture will be discussed in relationship to the Aesthetic Movement.

Moran concluded that the public, drawn to a celebrity because of the manufactured persona, ironically desired to know the "real" person behind the publicity. For this reason, the market for stories about the celebrity at home or on vacation became more popular than articles about the celebrity at work within his field. Moran argued that by the point a person achieved celebrity, they were famous for being famous, not for their cultural production.

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[74] Ibid., *19.*
[75] Ibid. Moran cited Linda Haverty Rugg's *Picturing Ourselves: Photography and Autobiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 42.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid., 20.

The fusing of self-promotion and public construction became consuming, even to the celebrity himself.[78]

In his 2004 monograph, *Authors Inc.: Literary Celebrity in the Modern United States, 1880-1980*, Loren Glass presented the idea of "celebrity authorship" and demonstrated that writers' self-marketing and promotion of their names and personalities often overshadowed their work. [79] Glass explained that the author as celebrity was no longer his own person, but "a new public subject," whose artistic component was incapable of being entirely separated from the audience.[80] By the turn of the twentieth century, an "authorial star system" was established in which personality became as important as production of literature.[81] Authors became integrated into the social scene and gossiped about in newspapers and magazines. According to Glass, "the modernist 'genius' could easily become a star" as a result of the dissolving of the boundary between literature and mass media. [82] In other words, the genius personality became famous because of the dissolution of the boundary between high and mass culture.

Glass forwarded several ideas in *Authors Inc.* Most relevant to this project, Glass argued that the barrier between the base marketplace and high art was permeable, often recognized only in its crossing by well-known authors. Glass did this most effectively in his chapter on Gertrude Stein. In order to be marketable, he stated, the author had to remain exciting to press and public. "For Stein, the ongoing challenge was to forge a working relationship between existing, being exciting, and writing."[83] In order to do this, she had to forget the audience and write "as if she were dead, as if her critical reputation were already established."[84] She acted as if she was already one of those authors of immortal genius, and the public treated her as such.[85]

Of the scholarship on literature and celebrity, the arguments put forth by Nancy Bentley in her 2009 monograph, *Frantic Panoramas: American Literature and Mass Culture, 1870-1920*, are perhaps the easiest to translate and apply to the world of visual art. While the examples she presented focus on particular authors and their works, Bentley's wide lens

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[78] Ibid., 23.
[79] Loren Glass, *Authors Inc., Literary Celebrity in the Modern United States, 1880-1980* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 2.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid., 136-37.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.

captures the similar effects that the new Gilded Age mass culture had on all art forms and related institutions. Furthermore, she effectively argued for the importance of continuing to study the relationships between celebrity and the arts in an historical context. Bentley explained that the purveyors of high art of the Gilded Age were often fearful of and sometimes inspired by the public's interest in all things novel and sensory as opposed to what they saw as refined and thoughtful. This debate continues today, and so its roots are worth examining.[86]

Like Moran and Glass, Bentley also examined the anxious relationship between high and low culture in the Gilded Age. Bentley argued that commercial mass culture and high art intersected in two seemingly contradictory ways. First, democratic mass culture exposed the didactic nature of high art and its reinforcement of class structure. Second, the intersection of high and mass culture revealed both as products of market culture. According to Bentley, high culture (she spoke only to literature) both drew on and repudiated mass culture's democratic nature. The most important development of the Gilded Age affecting the writer was "the uneven, conflicted intersection of the bourgeois public sphere with the emergent publics . . . made possible through mass-mediated communication and industry."[87] Additionally, makers of high art and culture had to compete with the new mass culture experiences available – burlesque theater, amusement parks, department stores, and even "happenings" such as staged train wrecks. Bentley showed that artists simultaneously attempted to distinguish their work from such commercial, low culture, while drawing on its publicity techniques in an attempt to match its appeal. That is, the aesthetics of high and low culture intersected more often than previously imagined.[88]

According to Bentley, the makers of taste in the Gilded Age were not just those purveyors of high culture working with the National Academy of Arts, or other sanctified art authorities. The tastemakers of the period also included the promoters of spectacles and oddities to a mass public. Starting in the 1850s, American artists and intellectuals worked on building a "map of the terrain of culture, organized around an impressive constellation of new metropolitan museums, concert halls, and scholarly institutions."[89] Despite this push for cultural uplift, in September, 1896, over forty thousand people gathered to watch "the

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[86] Nancy Bentley, *Frantic Panoramas: American Literature and Mass Culture, 1870-1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), *passim*.
[87] Ibid., 5.
[88] Ibid., 39.
[89] Ibid., 1.

Crash on Crush," a head-on train wreck staged by promoter William George Crush in a small town fifteen miles north of Waco, Texas, that he built and named just for the event after himself. The crash was an "intensified sensory event that had been deliberately set outside the quotidian realities of everyday life."[90] For art authorities, the spectacle had none of the criteria of high culture, but struggling artists would not have failed to note the widespread appeal of the pseudo-event.

"Mass culture" in the Gilded Age was the domain of commercial forms of production, everything from amusement parks to innovative advertising. Bentley named the individual event in the category of mass culture, the "frantic panorama," but the term is interchangeable with Boorstin's "pseudo-event."[91] According to Bentley, the similarities of the frantic panorama to traditional art were "unnerving." However, high art was rooted in culture, "the distinct forms of human civilization that are an outgrowth of sustained local habituation and continuities of time."[92] On one hand, culture was creativity transmitted to its audience through inherited genres and conventions. The frantic panorama, on the other hand, was created only through "sheer sensation" and for the sole purpose of commercial profit.[93] While cultural authorities denounced mass culture and the "tyranny of novelty," artists and intellectuals were influenced by these sensory events for the mass audiences they drew. [94] According to Bentley, this intersection of high art and mass culture was made possible and by the mass communication industry.

Mass media allowed the ideas of many, not just a few leaders of state or religion, to reach the public. Bentley explained:

> Increasingly, ordinary individuals select for themselves the stories, images, and sonic rhythms that most stimulate their memory and desire, choosing from the materials of mass-mediated imagery that is more or less detached from the tastes of higher authorities and very often indifferent to national boundaries.[95]

Through mass media, individuals could choose the images and stories that stimulated their own imaginations, and the wide variety of continuously produced mass media validated the importance of their desire to so. Others have argued that this democratization of culture was simply a capitalization of culture, that traditional cultural authorities were supplanted

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[90] Ibid., 1-2.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid., 2-3.
[93] Ibid., 3.
[94] Ibid., 3-5.
[95] Ibid., 8.

by market forces. While this democratization or capitalization may be blamed for eroding the high art standard, it is perhaps more accurate to argue that it produced cracks where other ideas could adhere. For example, at the turn of the twentieth century, modernist artists reacted against the academy by rejecting its standards and authority. In retrospect, the modernists were often described in contrast to the Gilded Age generation of artists who were still trying to conform to high cultural standards while remaining unaware that culture was shifting. However, this "genteel generation" is not so easily pegged. As this thesis will argue, William Merritt Chase worked and promoted himself in the margin between high and low culture. He was not only aware of the mass media-generated cultural shift that was rewriting the rules of high art; he became a master manipulator of the media. If the mass media was an ocean tide eroding the shores of high art, the artists who responded through the media, were the gentle pull of the moon on that tide. Chase worked for and eventually gained the acceptance of the academy, but made a career and a living for himself through his manipulation of the mass media. This genteel generation explored ways to incorporate "elements of the rival mass culture" into their work, even while criticizing it.[96] As much as it would make analysis easier, cultural output cannot be easily divided into high and low art, high culture and mass culture. Mass culture was both a source of friction and creativity for authors and artists, all made possible through changes in technology, which delivered a myriad of ideas to the public. Bentley, therefore, located those Gilded Age creatives who were drawing on or using mass culture, not at the end of a stilted and declining Victorian Age, "but at the beginning of the analytic exploration of sensory consciousness."[97] Bentley demonstrated that artists were aware of and responding to a mass audience. Mass culture was both a target for their criticism and an inspiration for their work. Bentley argued that the artists' interest in the analysis of work was one of the defining characteristics of the age and one that met resistance. Many felt the focus on the analytic took the spiritual dimension out of art, a fear mostly dramatically realized in Thomas Eakins' graphic and realistic depiction of surgery.[98] Artists, writers, and critics also

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[96] Ibid., 7-9. Bentley cites Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). She does not discuss Chase.
[97] Ibid., 9-10.
[98] Thomas Eakins, *Portrait of Dr. Samuel D. Gross* (The Gross Clinic), 1875, oil on canvas, 243.8 × 198.1 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art, accessed July 25, 2020, https://philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/299524.html.

argued for a realistic, analytic approach as a contribution to a more democratic understanding of art and literature.

The goal of making high art more approachable to the public would seem to fit nicely with the goals of making a truly American art and making art an agent of social and civic uplift. Here, too, the analytical, audience-aware artist also met resistance, this time from those attracted to high culture because of the idea that it separated them from the low. The appeal of art for many was the chance to show off their advanced taste. The final chapter of this thesis examines the anxiety produced in making a work of art both great and commercially appealing. William Merritt Chase walked a careful line between creating paintings that would earn him a living without losing his credibility as an artist creating art purely for its own sake. To develop these ideas and understand how he used his work to gain celebrity, I built on the research of several Chase scholars.

Scholarship on William Merritt Chase: Biography and Analysis of Work

In this thesis, I apply ideas about mass media, celebrity, self-promotion, and the pseudo-event, as put forth by the cultural theorists and historians discussed thus far, to analyze the career, artwork, and advertising genius of William Merritt Chase during his time at the Tenth Street Studio. In this endeavor, I was aided by several art historians' expertise on Chase. These works consist of illustrated art catalogues of Chase's work, articles in art journals covering specific periods of his career, and biographies. These works provided practical biographical details and in-depth descriptions and evaluations of his artwork, but the authors made little-to-no analysis of Chase as celebrity. In contrast, Sarah Burns, in her cultural history *Inventing the Modern Artist*, applied theories about mass media and self-promotion to the nineteenth-century American art world. While Burns's arguments proved most to be the most directly relevant, this thesis would not have been possible without the work of all of these scholars of Chase and his art.

Katherine Metcalf Roof's 1917 biography *The Life and Art of William Merritt Chase* remains an authoritative biography of the artist, despite its lack of criticism or historical perspective.[99] Roof was a former student and close friend of Chase. Before his death in 1916, Chase requested Roof as his biographer. Her intimate portrait, published within a year of his death, overflows with primary sources. Chase provided her with images, quotes,

[99] Katherine Metcalf Roof, *The Life and Art of William Merritt Chase* (1917; New York: Hacker Art Books, 1975).

letters, and stories. Chase's wife, Alice, and well-known colleagues such as Frank Duveneck, Carroll Beckwith, Robert Blum, Alden Weir, Frederick Dielman, and Dora Wheeler contributed letters and reminiscences. Chase was not a prolific letter writer and only a handful of personal correspondence survived. This makes the letters printed in Roof's work invaluable. Her firsthand descriptions of the Tenth Street Studio and the events Chase orchestrated there were useful in examining Chase's self-promotion, especially in conversation with primary source accounts. For example, in Chapter Four, I compare Roof's version of the performance of the famous dancer Carmencita at the Tenth Street Studio with reports from mass media outlets to show how Chase turned the event into a marketing opportunity.

For his 1991 biography *William Merritt Chase: A Genteel Bohemian,* Keith Bryant relied heavily on Roof's work, but contextualized Chase within the Gilded Age.[100] As a historian and not an art historian, Bryant refrained from analyzing Chase's paintings, artistic style, or perspective as an artist. Bryant did sometimes tiptoe up to a discussion of Chase's advertising ambitions, but never fleshed out the idea he intuited. Nonetheless, Bryant's biography was useful for its reliable chronology, historical context, and references to newspaper articles in the citations.

Curator and art historian Ronald Pisano dedicated his career to researching Chase. He authored numerous exhibition catalogues and created the comprehensive *Complete Catalogue of Known and Documented Work by William Merritt Chase (1849–1916)*, published posthumously in four volumes.[101] A curator and director at several museums with Chase collections, Pisano was considered "America's leading Chase scholar."[102] Combining Pisano's

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[100] Keith L. Bryant, *William Merritt Chase: A Genteel Bohemian* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991).

[101] Ronald G. Pisano, *Complete Catalogue of Known and Documented Work by William Merritt Chase (1849–1916),* Vol. 1, *The Paintings in Pastel, Monotypes, Painted Tiles and Ceramic Plates, Watercolors, and Prints* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006);
Ronald G. Pisano, *Complete Catalogue of Known and Documented Work by William Merritt Chase (1849–1916), Vol. 2, Portraits in Oil* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007);
Ronald G. Pisano, *Complete Catalogue of Known and Documented Work by William Merritt Chase (1849–1916), Vol. 3, Landscapes in Oil* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009);
Ronald G. Pisano, *Complete Catalogue of Known and Documented Work by William Merritt Chase (1849–1916), Vol. 4, Still Lifes, Interiors, Figures, Copies of Old Masters, and Drawings* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

[102] Roberta Smith, "Ronald G. Pisano, 51, Collector of Expert on Long Island's Art, *New York Times*, December 31, 2000, Section 1, 30, accessed July 25, 2020, New York Times Article Archive.

analyses of Chase's art with the aforementioned theories on celebrity proved invaluable to the conclusions presented in this thesis.

Historiography of the Tenth Street Studio

A few secondary works have attempted to directly address the artistic, cultural, and even political significance of the Tenth Street Studio. Four of these sources also addressed Chase's paintings of his studio, arriving at widely different conclusions. While these authors did not apply their ideas about the studio to an examination of the artist's creation of celebrity, they did provide contextual information as well as analysis about Chase's art. Notably, Sarah Burns enhanced this discussion of art celebrity through her recognition of the relationship between the Aesthetic Movement and a public shifting its focus from moral and spiritual concerns to images and appearances.

Any historiography on Chase's studio would not be possible without its reintroduction into the academic art world by Nicolai Cikovsky in the *Archives of American Art Journal* in 1976.[103] With little commentary or interpretation, Cikovsky reprinted an 1879 article by Gilded Age artist and critic John Moran from the *Art Journal*. Writing just after Chase opened his Tenth Street Studio to the public, Moran described its trappings in detail. Moran's inventory of bric-a-brac and vivid studio description was accompanied by brief, but telling words from Cikovsky's introduction. The twentieth-century art critic used the words of the nineteenth-century writer to show Chase's studio as the culmination of the Aesthetic Movement. He explained that the studio was "the most accessible, impressive, and concrete symbol of the esthetic beliefs Chase and his contemporaries brought to America."[104] He argued that even more than the paintings of Chase or his colleagues, the Tenth Street Studio was the embodiment of "art for art's sake" and that the studio represented a shift from creating art from nature or for the purpose of spiritual uplift to creating art from art to be judged on its own terms.

In this sense, Cikovsky shared the goals of the 1879 author, Moran, in bringing to light a significant aesthetic expression. Cikovsky (like Moran) focused on the studio as Chase's "most important artistic achievement" and an "open demonstration of his artistic

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[103] Nicolai Cikovsky, "William Merritt Chase's Tenth Street Studio," *Archives of American Art Journal* 16, no. 2 (1976): 2-14, accessed July 25, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1086/aaa.16.2.1556890; John Moran, "Studio-Life in New York," *Art Journal* 5 (1879): 343-45, accessed July 25, 2020, JSTOR.
[104] Ibid., 10.

conventions and intentions," perhaps at the expense of his paintings.[105] This is an interesting, but flawed idea. Cikovsky failed to address Chase's paintings *of* his studio (Moran is excused here as only a few had been executed by the studio's opening). Cikovsky considered the artfully arranged studio as art object itself and as the height of the expression of art for art's sake. However, the paintings of that art object, especially as they were combined with themes of the modern art market as expressed by the figures contained in the scene, became even more complete expressions of art for art's sake – art about art and depicting art making and buying. This thesis argues that these paintings of the studio were the culmination of Chase's vision for how he advertised himself to the world as an artist. Nonetheless, Cikovsky rescued Moran's article from obscurity and encouraged a new wave of writing on the Tenth Street Studio.

In her 1996 doctoral dissertation, "Therapy, Commodities, and the Decorated Studio: Images of the Studio of William Merritt Chase," Linda Toth Graham argued that the artist's studio, perfected and made widely recognizable by Chase, represented a refuge from an increasingly industrial and capitalist world.[106] Graham wrote that during the nineteenth century, the studio became "a distinct social entity" and "an emblem or a trope" used to represent various concerns about art and culture.[107] She presented the example of French painter Henri Reginault as representative of the uninspired academicians regurgitating traditional pictures. Reginault blamed the dark walls and poor lighting of the studio. In contrast, those artists working outdoors saw the world literally in a different light and produced original works. Graham argued that nineteenth-century artists and thinkers began to see the studio in its relationship with modern painting as "a trope" of "a moribund academic tradition," and an impediment to creating original work.[108] At the same time, the public and the press began to see the studio in its relationship to modern social life as a refuge from a changing world. While artists had begun to see immersion in the world outside the studio's walls as a requirement for original art, the public saw the studio as separating the artist from the everyday cares of that world. In other words, to the public, the artist's studio could be both a site of art making and "a refuge from both the conditions and

[105] Ibid., 11.
[106] Linda Toth Graham, "Therapy, Commodities, and the Decorated Studio: Images of the Studio of William Merritt Chase" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1996), 1-14.
[107] Ibid., 1.
[108] Ibid., 1-2.

the values of life lived under industrial capitalism."[109] Graham argued that this perception of the artist as separate from the outside, modern world increased public fascination with Chase and his studio. Of all the American artists working at the time, Chase worked almost as hard on decorating his studio as he did painting, implying that Chase knew the studio was representative of him as an artist. From this point, this thesis diverges from Graham's conclusions. For example, Graham argued that Chase's painting represented an escape from modern life, and in a few cases, it did. Nonetheless, Chase very consciously projected a cosmopolitan appearance in his dress and he was at the forefront of modern painting trends, both in his own work and as an advocate of others' work. He stayed current on the international art scene and worked to bring a uniquely American style of art to the public. Other artists, like Eastman Johnson, who self-consciously presented an historical or nostalgic image in their work would be better examples supporting Graham's argument. Nonetheless, the historical context Graham provided was valuable to this thesis in sparking my research questions. For example, Chase increasingly worked *en plein air*, in the outdoor light, and so the studio was really unnecessary to his work. So, why keep it? And he did not just maintain his studio; he often went broke decorating it. Here I applied Graham's earlier idea: at the same time that the studio was becoming passé for artists, the public's fascination intensified. The studio, then, could serve as an attraction. I draw on and then go beyond Graham's point to argue that Chase used his studio as a marketing tool, opening it to the press and public, as well as painting images of it to reach an even wider audience through exhibition and reproduction of these advertisements.

Art historian Roger Stein analyzed not just Chase's studio, but also Chase's paintings *of* his studio in the chapter "Artifact as Ideology: The Aesthetic Movement in Its American Cultural Context" from *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement.*[110] Stein used Chase's painting *Studio Interior* (Brooklyn Museum) to contrast with other paintings of interiors by Chase's immediate predecessors and contemporaries in order to illustrate the essential elements of the Aesthetic Movement. For example, Stein compared Chase's *Studio*

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[109] Ibid., 2-3.

[110] Roger B. Stein, "Artifact as Ideology: The Aesthetic Movement in Its American Cultural Context," in *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), 23-51. While Stein included a picture of *Studio Interior* (Brooklyn Museum) and cited the Brooklyn Museum, he called the painting *In the Studio* in his book. He also used the date 1880 for the work, while the Brooklyn Museum cites 1882. While there are examples of other sources using the title *In the Studio* for this work as well, I have chosen to use the owning institution's title of *Studio Interior* in this thesis.

Interior to an older painting by Edward Lamson Henry of an interior in which objects, rife with symbolism, convey a traditional narrative. The realistically painted objects, the classical composition, and the nostalgic tone contrast sharply with Chase's studio painting created only twelve years later. In Chase's work, objects in his studio, collected from different eras and parts of the globe, fill the viewing plane – an oriental rug, a classical bust, a vase of flowers, textured wallpaper – but they create aesthetic harmony, not historical narrative. Stein explained that the combination of objects of *Studio Interior* "dissolves the complex pattern . . . into a present visual order."[111] Stein claimed that the main significance of *Studio Interior* was "the deconstruction of the associative process."[112] Chase's work, unlike Henry's, did not ask the viewer to make meaning out of the objects, but only appreciate their aesthetic beauty. Stein explained that "the iconographic value and symbolic import of the individual artifacts" dissolved and resolved into "pattern and style, a visual harmony that sacrifices particular origins into the grand cadence of Art." [113] In other words, Chase was creating art for art's sake. This concept becomes relevant in later chapters.

Through her 1993 chapter "The Price of Beauty" in the book *American Iconology: New Approaches to Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature* and in her 1996 book *Inventing the Modern Artist*, art historian Sarah Burns contributed the most valuable and nuanced writing on Chase's studio and his paintings of the studio.[114] In both works, Burns addressed the studio's role in the commodification of art. The studio was the site of both making and selling art and, as such, it had power in shaping the national identity: one that centered "more on outward appearance than on inner character."[115] Burns compared the studio to the department store in that both have as their ultimate goal the creation of desire. The Aesthetic Movement, which focused on the "surface values" of art objects, reached its height at the same time that America was transitioning to a consumer-based culture with its desire driven by appearances.[116] Chase's studio paintings were the perfect art objects for this climate. The paintings of the luxurious studio populated by elegant visitors examining art

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[111] Ibid., 40.
[112] Ibid., 39, 41.
[113] Ibid., 41.
[114] Sarah Burns, "The Price of Beauty: Art, Commerce, and the Late Nineteenth-Century American Studio Interior," in *American Iconology: New Approaches in Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature,* ed. David C. Miller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 209-238.
[115] Ibid., 211.
[116] Ibid., 223.

for purchase, elevated, hid, and "sanitized" their function as advertisements.[117] Burns wrote in *Inventing the Modern Artist* that Chase was able to tread the "fine line between blunt materialism and something more." He was able to "create an aesthetic product destined for the marketplace without appearing to collude too deeply with its commodification."[118] Burns's work has been essential to developing this thesis's argument about Chase's paintings as veiled advertisements, explored fully in Chapter Four.

This thesis stands on the shoulders of the cultural theorists and historians who defined and analyzed taste, celebrity, and the pseudo-event. It benefits especially from their discussions of these issues in the context of the rise of mass media, which brought us the celebrity feature and the cult of personality. My arguments here answer the call of those pioneers of celebrity studies who challenged historians to look at celebrity not as a product of the twentieth century but as a shaping force throughout history and a lens to better understand our subjects. In order to make these arguments, I used the work of historians of Gilded Age literary celebrity as a model and applied their methods to an analysis of celebrity in the late-nineteenth century American art world. In order to make this correlation, I also drew on the analyses and discussions of Chase's life and work created by the historians and curators who have catalogued his career. The diverse works discussed in this chapter, in conversation, provide the foundation for this thesis's main argument. That is, Chase, master of self-promotion, used the paintings of his studio as the ultimate advertisement for the aesthetic climate of the Gilded Age. That is, Chase, master of self-promotion and aesthetics, used paintings of the Tenth Street Studio as advertisements for his artistic talent and became a Gilded Age art celebrity.

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[117] Ibid., 230.

[118] Sarah Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded Age America* (New Haven and London, UK: Yale University Press, 1996), 67.

CHAPTER TWO: THE DANGERS OF OBSCURITY

> "Genius is only recognized in people who succeed." - William Merritt Chase, 1897. [119]

Celebrity today is often thought of casually, as a dream of personal freedom achieved through recognition and "a liberation from powerless anonymity."[120] Celebrity is also sometimes conceptualized as something that is passively received by a deserving individual for his unique talents. An historical exploration of celebrity finds these popular ideas about this cultural phenomenon lacking, or even discredits them. Instead, historians find that celebrity across the centuries was "the result of a deliberate process of self-promotion and media manipulation" by the celebrity, balanced with objectification and commodification of the celebrity by the media and the public.[121] These conclusions certainly apply to an historical examination of the celebrity of a Gilded Age American artist.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, American artists who became celebrities did not achieve such a status through their talent alone, although that was certainly important in this competitive era. Instead, celebrity artists were constructs of high and popular culture, the media, and the artist themselves. According to art historian Sarah Burns, "The publishing industry helped make reputations and establish canons, rendering the artist a public, media-generated figure. Concurrently, artists learned to manipulate the media to their own advantage."[122] In short, Gilded Age artists needed the press to achieve celebrity status.

This play for media attention, and thus celebrity, was not just some recreational pursuit in service of the ego. The Gilded Age American art scene was cutthroat. Artists were competing in a global market for the patrons of more established European artists legitimized by the respected academies. Art was a status symbol and European art projected taste in an era defined by conspicuous display. There were few patrons of American art, and most artists supported themselves as teachers or illustrators for the growing popular newspapers and journals. At stake, when artists worked to create celebrity, were their livelihoods, and sometimes even their lives. While this latter statement may seem

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[119] Ronald G. Pisano, *William Merritt Chase*, (New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, 1986), 26. Pisano quoted Chase from: "Some Students' Questions Briefly Answered," *Art Amateur* (March 1897): 76.
[120] Braudy, 7.
[121] Morgan, 366.
[122] Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist*, 2.

hyperbolic, we need look no further than the Tenth Street Studio for an example of the danger of obscurity.

Early in May of 1894, just one year after the country's worst economic collapse yet, the New York-based artist Henry Alexander lugged one of his richly detailed paintings from art dealer to art dealer, trying to make an important sale.[123] As he walked through Manhattan, he was surrounded by thousands of paintings – in hotels, beer halls, offices, galleries, and palatial homes. Unfortunately for the talented Alexander, foreign art ruled. Seeking to add to their social prestige through a display of the artistic, well-to-do New Yorkers crammed every space of their living quarters with bric-a-brac and paintings gathered from afar. The value of French paintings, which had been judged and validated with the awards of the Paris Salon, was as high as the roof of the recently completed Manhattan Life Insurance Building on Broadway.[124]

Alexander returned to the Tenth Street Studio Building to find himself locked out of his second-floor studio room by the landlord. He hadn't paid his rent and he wouldn't be able to do so, until he sold a painting. He sat on the studio steps and briefly sobbed before heading back out to walk the streets of Manhattan. If he ever sold the painting he took door to door that day, he likely drank the profits as he was reported to do by his colleagues at the studio building.[125]

A few days later, on Saturday, May 12, Alexander came back to the studio and begged to be let into his room to get another painting. He pleaded that he was broke and hungry, but that he only needed to make a $150 sale to get back onto his feet. The janitor let him into his room to select a painting, likely his prized interior of the Hebrew Orphan Asylum, which he had hoped to enter into the exhibition of the Academy of Design. Instead, it would have to be sold.[126]

William Merritt Chase, the only artist at the Tenth Street Studio who really knew the downtrodden painter, saw Alexander "in an art dealer's store in Fifth avenue with a picture

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[123] "Artist Alexander Ended His Life," *New York Herald*, May 13, 1894, 6, accessed August 2, 2020, Fulton Search.
[124] M. H. Dunlop, *A Gilded City: Scandal and Sensation in Turn-of-the-Century New York,* (New York: Perennial, 2001), 43-47.
[125] "Artist Alexander Ended His Life," 6; "An Artist's Suicide," *(New York) Evening World*, May 15, 1894, 5, accessed August 2, 2020, Chronicling America, Library of Congress.
[126] Ibid.; "Artist Alexander Commits Suicide, *New York Times*, May 16, 1894, 9, accessed August 2, 2020, New York Times Article Archive.

under his arm."[127] Chase and Alexander had something in common besides an address. They were both trained in Munich, and they both had a talent for painting the lavish interior scenes that perfectly captured the values of the Aesthetic Movement.[128] At the dealer's store, Alexander complained to Chase that his feet and legs hurt from all the walking he had done to try and find a buyer. Chase was the last of his peers to see Alexander alive.

Alexander must have made the sale that weekend because "he was in the barroom all of Monday, drinking freely," according to the *Herald*.[129] He returned late that night to his room at the Oriental Hotel on Broadway and Thirty-Ninth, which he had rented "with his last pennies."[130] He brought a bottle of whiskey back with him in his bag, "but in his satchel he also had a bottle of carbolic acid."[131] He pulled the hotel table close to the bed and poured the poison into a glass. He drank half the bottle of whiskey, and all but a little of the carbolic acid. He died just after four a.m. on May 15, 1894. The *Herald* reported that he was "despondent because of his inability to earn a living by his brush."[132] Obscurity meant ruin.

European training, technical painting skill, connections with other artists, a grasp of aesthetic trends, and a fine studio were not enough to guarantee the survival of an American artist. Nineteenth-century America demanded a spectacle. Several Gilded Age sea changes affected how American artists sought recognition. Of these, the rise of the mass media made the most direct and significant impact, while the spread of the Aesthetic Movement could provide a desirable path to celebrity for a capitalizing artist.

Rise of the Mass Media

Since the establishment of the Republic, newspapers have played a central role within American culture. American democracy required an informed public and a free press to report to that public. Literacy was important for the same reason, and so, the press's reading audience was constantly growing, though it was initially limited mainly to eligible voters – white, propertied men. Therefore, early newspapers centered their coverage on business and politics, and most were aligned with a particular political party. Much of the

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[127] "Artist Alexander Ended His Life," 6.
[128] The Aesthetic Movement is defined and discussed later in this chapter in the section "Aesthetic Movement as Avenue for Self-Promotion."
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid.
[131] The N*ew York Times* reported that it was oxalic acid, while the *New York Herald* and the *New York World* reported that it was carbolic acid.
[132] "Artist Alexander Ended His Life," 6.

space was taken up with shipping and stock information. There was little to no mention of the arts and the limited topics covered correlated to their limited readership.[133]

In the 1820s, visionary editors seeking to grow their audiences began to expand coverage to a variety of topics and interests, many of them cultural. Business boomed. From about two hundred newspapers published in 1800, the number rose to over twelve hundred by 1820.[134] By 1830, steam power allowed for easier production of newspapers and drove down costs. At the same time, the expanding postal service simplified and increased circulation.[135] The *New York Sun* led the way towards mass readership after its founding in 1833 by focusing on local and national news and covering "society news" in addition to "hard news." In New York City, several papers merged to further drive down costs, ushering in the era of the penny press and further increasing circulation. Baltimore, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., and Cincinnati newspapers followed suit.[136]

Soon after the American painter and inventor Samuel Morse sent his first telegraph in 1844, instant communication changed the way people exchanged information. Newspapers put the technology to work by employing correspondents and further increasing the breadth and variety of their coverage.[137] In the 1850s, newspapers began including illustrations of the day's events. Photography and the ability to print lithographs led to an explosive growth of mass publications in post-Civil War America and created a larger viewing public for artists' work.

Rise of Art Journalism

Newspaper articles on art were rare before 1800, gradually increasing through the first half of the century. According to David Dearinger, historian of art criticism, the few antebellum newspapers that covered art at all, ran either brief exhibition reviews or dry "anthologies."[138] These anthologies were short columns on artworks and artists' travels, under titles such as "Sketchings" or "Art Matters."[139] They were usually in list-form and

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[133] David Dearinger, *Rave Review: American Art and Its Critics, 1826-1925* (New York: National Academy of Design, 2000), 17-22.
[134] Ibid., 22-23.
[135] Barbara Groseclose, *Nineteenth-Century American Art* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000), 78-79.
[136] Dearinger, *Rave Review*, 23.
[137] David M. Kennedy, Lizabeth Cohen, Thomas A. Bailer, and Mel Piehl, eds., *The Brief American Pageant* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 208.
[138] Dearinger, *Rave Review*, 23.
[139] Ibid.

covered about ten items. The exhibition reviews were equally brief and generally did nothing more than compare one year's exhibition with the previous.

In contrast, journals and magazines greatly increased coverage of American artists in the nineteenth century. Before 1825, there were fewer than one hundred periodicals published in the United States; by 1850, there were almost six hundred. While these publications covered a variety of subjects, they dedicated more and more space to the arts. They were also increasingly illustrated with engravings based on paintings by American artists, providing the artists with more visibility and recognition from the public. Editors also began hiring artists to create original work for their periodicals, and some began regular columns about art.[140]

After the Civil War, periodicals grew in circulation and size, while increasing the number and quality of images in the form of prints. Periodicals dedicated entirely to art began circulating, often with the goal of bringing art to the public as a form of cultural uplift. Important art periodicals from the 1870s and 1880s included *Art Journal*, *Magazine of Art*, *Art Interchange*, and *American Art Review*. In addition to information on exhibitions, trends, and movements, they sometimes contained gossip on the artists themselves, ushering in the artist as celebrity. By this time, many of the general periodicals also began printing more art articles, including *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, *Scribner's Magazine*, and *Scribner's Monthly*, which became the *Century*.[141] By the 1870s, the main New York newspapers (*Times, Tribune, Herald*, *Sun* and *Post*) dramatically increased art coverage and hired art editors and professional critics.[142]

This increase in art coverage was in direct response to the public's increasing interest in art, which was, in turn, a result of increasing education and literacy, leisure time, and venues to view art.[143] The importance of the press in shaping the public's opinion about art cannot be overstated. In 1875, one editorial writer claimed, "During the last twenty years, journalism has become prominent, if not per-eminent, as a profession. The press is

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[140] Ibid., 20-21.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Margaret C. Conrads, *Winslow Homer and the Critics: Forging a National Art in the 1870s* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 3-4.
[143] Another major factor in the public's increased art interest was the rise of the Aesthetic Movement, which is discussed later in this chapter in the section "Aesthetic Movement as Avenue for Self-Promotion: Wilde and Whistler."

to-day the most potent agency for good or evil."[144] By the 1870s, art journalists had a great deal of power in creating public opinion as well as making and breaking the careers of artists. In many cases, the fate of an artist lay not in his talent, but in the hands of the critic.

Celebrity Journalism: The Feature

The media development that most affected the artist was the shift to "human interest" journalism. During the Gilded Age, American culture was being redefined because of urbanization, immigration, and industrialization, in addition to the rise of the mass media. The upper and middle classes felt threatened by increasing immigration and the anonymity of urban life. In response, according to historian of celebrity Amy Henderson, culture "tilted inward" toward an interest in self-definition and personality, as opposed to outward, toward working for a public good.[145]

Whereas previously the public focused attention on "heroes" who represented national ideals and virtues, after the Civil War, the focus shifted to a remarkable "personality" who represented individualization among the masses. In this increasingly industrial, urban, complex, and diverse American society, many felt their sense of individuality and autonomy threatened, and the need to distinguish the self from the crowd became more important. As the public's interest in character was replaced by interest in personality, media coverage shifted from the achievements of the well-known subject to coverage of his tastes, quirks, mannerisms, style, and personal life. This kind of coverage became the "celebrity feature," with which we are still familiar today.[146]

The celebrity feature story treated all subjects fairly similarly. Since colorful personality, not meaningful achievement, was the article's concern, it didn't matter if the feature focused on a banker, a railroad tycoon, a socialite, a politician, or a painter. Editors assigned writers to cover the leading personalities of city hall, the courts, religious institutions, high society, industry, and the arts. According to the historian Sarah Burns in *Inventing the Modern Artist*, "Among the delicacies consumed by the mass media and relished in turn by an expanding public were artists of all kinds."[147] The irony of this focus

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[144] Ibid., 3. Conrads quoted: Charles F. Wingate, ed., *Views and Interviews on Journalism* (New York: F. B. Patterson, 1875), 7.
[145] Henderson, 49-54.
[146] Ponce de Leon, 36-37.
[147] Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist*, 4, 19. Burns noted that most American artists, as well as the public conception of artists, would have been "white, male, Anglo-Saxon" during the Gilded Age.

on personality was that the contemporary reader thought he was learning about the man behind the celebrity, but the celebrity used the feature story as another way to broadcast his self-created public persona. To the celebrity artist, the feature was just more publicity; he had no reason to share his "true" self.[148] By the Gilded Age, the celebrity was aware that "the press was the pivotal institution that determined the degree and nature of his visibility, the institution through which other strategies of self-promotion were filtered and refracted."[149] He needed only to wield it effectively.

Gilded Age Masters of Self Promotion: Whitman and Twain

Enterprising creative types engineered an unlimited variety of these strategies for self-promotion designed to attract the filtering, refracting, and hopefully magnifying lens of the media. The poet Walt Whitman, for example, created an image for himself of "a majestic, grandfatherly poet, a patriotic wound dresser with his long beard."[150] He presented this healing image to a public still suffering from the losses incurred during a bloody Civil War. In a climate where many were looking to nature to find healing, Whitman aligned himself in the public imagination with the image of the butterfly, a symbol of rebirth. He did this by commissioning and circulating a portrait of himself appearing to ponder the essence of a butterfly gently resting on his finger. One reviewer, writing for the *New York Critic* in 1883, noted that the delicate butterfly contrasted with "the thick fingers and heavy ploughman's wrist."[151] Whitman's rustic outfit of a knit smoking jacket and felt hat, which he had donned for the portrait, was carefully chosen for its symbolism as well. Whitman was suggesting his association with a simpler, agrarian past in addition to the purity of nature.

In reality, this portrait, which was included in widely circulated editions of *Leaves of Grass* and reproduced in mass by the press, was a carefully crafted, man-made piece of publicity. The rustic ploughman was actually an intellectual from Brooklyn and the grandfatherly image was chosen only after his attempt to portray himself as "a magnetic sexual rebel" failed.[152] Perhaps most striking in its artifice, the butterfly chosen as the symbol of the poet's union with nature, was crafted from cardboard. According to Whitman

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[148] Ponce de Leon, 33.
[149] Ibid., 42.
[150] David Haven Blake, *Walt Whitman and the Culture of American Celebrity* (New Haven and London, UK: Yale University Press, 2006), xii.
[151] Ibid. Blake quoted from "Walt Whitman's New Book," *New York Critic*, January 13, 1883, 3.
[152] Ibid., xxi.

scholar, David Haven Blake, "The butterfly functions quite literally as a prop, one of the many items Whitman used to advertise and support different versions of himself."[153] Perhaps Whitman, who would often send in anonymous reviews of his own work to various newspapers and journals, best summed up the self-promotional value of making himself accessible in his poem "Song of Myself" from *Leaves of Grass*:

> I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
> And what I assume you shall assume,
> For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.[154]

As seen in this verse, Whitman's self-promotion occurred not only outside of his writing; it was enmeshed within it. His self-promotion was included in and integral to his art.

The American novelist Samuel Clemens employed similar promotional strategies. Clemens performed on the lecture circuit and posed for photographs as "Mark Twain," a folksy wisecracker from Missouri. His white suit and white hair were instantly recognizable partly because he worked tirelessly to circulate photographs of himself thus attired along with his trademark-like signature.[155] Twain created a simple, everyman public image and combined it with the use of comedy and colloquial language in his work (despite criticism by the literary elite who considered the style lowbrow) in order to achieve popular success and celebrity.

While Clemens himself was a highly cultured man of letters gaining acclaim as a novelist, the public Twain presented a persona of "sarcasm and vernacular voices," whose work drew on the popular and localized public entertainment of bygone days when the working class gathered to enjoy plays and speakers.[156] Twain determined that he could sell himself and his work by presenting this folksy character in live performances designed to capture media attention. Nancy Bentley, historian of American literature, best explained Twain's successful promotional strategy:

> But despite his start in local forms of populist entertainment, the phenomenon that was Mark Twain in fact belongs to the new mass culture of the post bellum world. Like Barnum, Twain was among the first figures to understand the synergy possible between electrifying live performances and

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[153] Ibid., 10.
[154] Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," *Leaves of Grass* (1893; New York: Bantam Books, 1983), 22.
[155] Sarah Robbins, "Textual Commodities and Authorial Celebrities," in *Oxford History of the Novel in English, Volume 6, The American Novel, 1870-1940,* eds. Priscilla Wald, Michael Eliott (Oxford, UK and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 8.
[156] Bentley, 101-3.

> newspaper publicity, a circuit that could simultaneously report an event and advertise the performer for a national and even an international audience.[157]

Samuel Clemens, the intellectual author, wrote the works that became American classics, but it was Mark Twain, the folksy jokester, that got the public interested in them.

Twain wrote nuanced examinations of race and American identity, often using comedy to dive into the heart of difficult topics, and irony to tangle with an audience who was not always in on his jokes. However, he used his charismatic personality to create an image that closed the gap between the popular public and the highbrow world of literature, selling many more books than most of his peers. Bentley noted that instead of seeing a "critical impasse between literary and commercial publics," Twain recognized the space between these groups as "an opportunity for profitable convergence" through "his uncanny understanding of the commodity that was publicity."[158] Regardless of the complexity of his message, he needed the press to sell it.

Also like Whitman, Twain would incorporate self-promotion within his writing. In his 1869 work *The Innocents Abroad*, Twain included a drawing that portended to be a caricature of one the novel's subjects, Bloodgood Cutter, whom he described as "a simple minded, honest, old-fashioned farmer with a strange proclivity for writing rhymes," or more simply as the "farmer poet."[159] The drawing was clearly a picture of Twain. According to literary scholar Nancy Cook, "In every good promotion, everything led back to the author."[160] This image was widely circulated and reproduced and helped make Twain "one of the most recognizable Americans of his time."[161] Twain's manufactured likeness became an advertisement for his particular brand of sharp humor.

Aesthetic Movement as Avenue for Self-Promotion: Wilde and Whistler

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a few notable artists and writers used the principles and popularity of aestheticism to achieve celebrity. At the simplest level, the Aesthetic Movement was the addition of fine art elements to the production of home goods and decorative objects such as wallpaper, rugs, ceramics, and stained glass windows.

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[157] Ibid., 103.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Nancy Cook, "Reshaping Publishing and Authorship in the Gilded Age," in *Perspectives on American Book History: Artifacts and Commentary*, eds. Scott E. Casper, Joanne D. Chalson, Jeffery D. Groves (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 233-4.
[161] Ibid.

The movement began in England and trickled into the United States by the 1870s. It spread rapidly across the Republic after its popularization by the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876, which highlighted masterful works of American artists and craftsman and celebrated decorative objects. Over the next several decades, the Aesthetic Movement pervaded almost all aspects of American culture.[162] The introduction of aesthetic principles into the public consideration produced a slew of art magazines, societies, and exhibitions. Simply put, people were interested in the movement and the media was happy to feed the fervor. Unsurprisingly, several savvy and creative individuals recognized the movement as a path to celebrity.

Like the movement itself, one of the purest examples of aesthete celebrity originated in England. By 1880, the poet, playwright, and novelist Oscar Wilde had created a public persona so compelling that it perhaps superseded his ability as a writer. Like Twain, Wilde often catered to his audience using comedy, especially in his plays. With notable exceptions, Wilde's work could lack nuance or verge on the trite, and so he cloaked his plots in the trappings of the day's fashion – the influence of the Aesthetic Movement. According to Wilde scholars, Richard Aldington and Stanley Weintraub, "His plots were often derivative and his characterization minimal, the comedies prospering because of Wilde's flair for masking the absurd in the fashionable life with audience pleasing repartee."[163] When Wilde came to conquer America, he did so not by speaking on or performing from his literary works, but instead by advertising talks on aestheticism and the decorative movement.

Wilde was extremely successful in both England and America (before charges of indecency discredited him in the eyes of mainstream culture) because he so completely married his image and his work with the tenets of the Aesthetic Movement. Recognizing the seemingly unquenchable public thirst for articles on aestheticism, newspapers spent months before Wilde's 1882 arrival in America describing his carefully curated appearance. The articles continued during his speaking tour, with the papers reporting on his physical appearance and mannerisms, as opposed to the content of his presentations. The newspapers detailed his velvet knee breeches and jackets, lace cuffs, and heeled patent leather pumps, as well as his elegant and graceful gestures. According to Mary Warner Blanchard in *Oscar Wilde's America,* the young author portrayed himself as "a living art" and

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[162] Doreen Bolger Burke, Preface to *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), 19.
[163] Richard Aldington and Stanley Weintraub, Introduction to *The Portable Oscar Wilde*, revised edition (1946; New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 2.

"the very incarnation of aestheticism."[164] While some people attended Wilde's public lectures to hear him speak on aestheticism and decorative arts, many came simply to "simply to survey Wilde's aesthetic style." [165] In the golden age of aestheticism, aligning oneself closely with the movement in a conspicuous manner was a sure way to draw the attention of the press.

The painter James McNeill Whistler also used a self-consciously constructed aesthetic appearance to capture the attention of the media. Much like Wilde, Whistler presented an aesthetic image of a "dandy," donning a monocle and a cape, and playing up a shock of white hair at his forehead. Also, like Wilde, his talent was limited in some areas, mainly in regard to formal drawing technique. According to scholars of Gilded Age art, Whistler was a poor drawer and his sketches could look cartoonish. His figures were flat and his painting surfaces thin; he appropriated many styles, but invented none.[166] Nevertheless, the expatriate American artist became wildly successful in his adopted London home as a society portrait painter, in part because of his understanding of the Aesthetic Movement and his masterful sense of style. Whistler knew how to wrap his subjects in the fashions of the day, complemented with the right aesthetic art objects as props to reinforce his patrons' association with the movement as well as their social status. He positioned his subjects in bold and alluring poses, cloaked them in finery, and encircled their portraits in showy frames. This costuming and presentation linked both the artist and patrons to the Aesthetic Movement in an intentionally conspicuous manner.

The media noticed and reported on his every exhibition, public appearance, and feuds with other celebrities. Whistler had the ability to create a sensation and recognized that there was no such thing as bad press, according to *New Yorker* writer Adam Gopnik.[167] For example, the model depicted in Whistler's flat, simplified, and decorative painting *The*

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[164] Mary Warner Blanchard, *Oscar Wilde's America: Counterculture in the Gilded Age* (New Haven and London, UK: Yale University Press, 1998), xi.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Pierre Cabanne, *Whistler* (1985; New York: Crown Publishing, 1994), 22; Eric Denker, *In Pursuit of the Butterfly: Portraits of James McNeill Whistler* (Seattle and London, UK: National Portrait Gallery in association with the University of Washington Press, 1995), 80-81; Adam Gopnik, "Whistler in the Dark," *New Yorker*, July 10, 1995, 68-73, accessed July 29, 2020, New Yorker Archive, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1995/07/17/whistler-in-the-dark.
[167] Gopnik, 68

White Girl, was widely known to be one of his young lovers.[168] The girl's conservative clothing purposefully juxtaposed by the artist with the flushed and sexually aware face of his subject caused a minor scandal and attracted much press coverage – all part of what Gopnik described as Whistler's "perpetual self-promotion machine."[169]

Whistler also aligned himself and his work with the popularity of the Aesthetic Movement through his landscapes. He created hundreds of small, blurry landscapes of London using thin paint and little delineation of subject. He then boldly titled these minor efforts after musical masterpieces, calling them "nocturnes" and "symphonies" and wreathed them in large, garish – literally gilded – gold frames.[170] Some of these landscapes were little more than a stripe of sky above a stripe of land, recalling the design of Japanese prints. This was no accident either. The Aesthetic Movement had made Japanese prints popular and highly collectable, and a slew of magazine articles covered all things Japanese-inspired.

The artist's bold self-confidence in personal style and mannerisms, his willingness to take on his critics, and his complete understanding of and ability to incorporate the elements of the Aesthetic Movement into his work made Whistler a celebrity. While Whistler may have been more master promoter than master painter, his complete mastery of aestheticism convinced journalists, upper-class patrons, and fellow artists that there was more going on underneath. The French master painter Edgar Degas was one of the many persuaded of Whistler's genius. According to Gopnik, "What [Whistler] did have was a sense of style so assured that it convince as good a judge as Degas that there must be something more going on underneath."[171] Whistler's finger was on the cultural pulse; he perfected and reflected the Aesthetic Movement back to the public.

From Revolution to Wallpaper

In a way, there was "something more going on underneath" the external trappings of the Aesthetic Movement, and there were substantial reasons that it became so completely

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[168] Ibid., 70; James McNeill Whistler, *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl*, 1862, oil on canvas, 83 7/8 x 42 1/2 in. (13 x 107.9 cm) Washington D. C., National Gallery of Art, accessed July 29, 2020, https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.12198.html.
[169] Gopnik, 70.
[170] Whistler, *Symphony in White;* James McNeill Whistler, *Nocturne in Black and Gold, the Falling Rocket*, 1875, oil on panel, 36 3/4 × 30 1/4 × 3 1/4 inches (93.3 × 76.8 × 8.3 cm), Detroit Institute of Arts, accessed July 29, 2020, accessed July 29, 2020, https://www.dia.org/art/collection/object/nocturne-black-and-gold-falling-rocket-64931.
[171] Gopnik, 68.

embedded in American culture during the Gilded Age. For many Americans, the movement became a means of offsetting the rapid transition toward a modern, industrial, and urban society made more diverse through increased immigration. The simple and handcrafted were seen as the antidote to the complex and mechanized. Many middle- and upper-class Americans were afraid that the rapidly modernizing culture "put severe strain upon traditional American values" and they longed for an imagined simpler past.[172] This nostalgia was encouraged by the centennial celebration of 1876, which glorified the craftsmen of previous generations and galvanized the movement.

The Aesthetic Movement did more than just reflect Americans' fears of and desires for their changing environment. It shaped the national climate in major ways and dramatically changed the art world. The movement provided a more inclusive view of society through art. Earlier generations of artists used nature as an emblem for American destiny, spiritual purity, and a healthy rural home and income. However, after a bloody Civil War, and the aforementioned changes in society and economy, nature no longer seemed to symbolize the shifting nation. The Aesthetic Movement incorporated elements of nature, but could also include urban and industrial elements. For instance, an aesthetically aware artist might design a floral pattern for a table, which was, in turn, mass-produced. The movement also celebrated the cosmopolitan city dweller and was made accessible to the average urban worker through mass media and mass production of artwork and art objects. The movement itself was the work of many artists and craftsmen and was accessible, at different levels, to all classes of people working under a variety of conditions. It also included women.[173] The previous generation of artists' use of nature symbolism in their work to depict women as nurturers of children and as spiritual guardians of the family was no longer sufficient for representing women's expanding roles. By the Gilded Age, women were moving into the world of wage labor and looking for areas in which they could affect change. The Aesthetic Movement not only accepted women as consumers of art objects, it included them as producers of art and art objects as well. Additionally, the movement presented art as an alternative outlet for spirituality. While religion was still important to many Americans, urbanization meant that the local church was often left behind, and consequently, it lost its authority over daily life. Many felt a spiritual void. Aesthetes argued

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[172] Roger B. Stein, "Artifact as Ideology: The Aesthetic Movement in Its American Cultural Context," in *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), 23, accessed July 29, 2020, Internet Archive.
[173] Ibid., 23-24.

that such a void could be filled through vague ideas about the power of beauty to uplift society morally.[174]

The artists and writers such as Whistler and Wilde, who used and shaped the movement, took aestheticism even further. They disassociated their art from nature, from everyday life, and from the goals of art in the past. While the objective of the previous generation of artists was to mimic nature or glorify God and State, the aesthetes declared "art for art's sake," that is, art as an independent statement. Art did not need to be symbolic or representative. It did not need to justify its existence at all. Many Americans, in turn, found in the movement a way to create identity in a complex climate where nature and religion no longer seemed adequate. This popular turn toward aestheticism resulted in the mass accumulation of art objects. For many collectors, collecting and displaying became equated with social status and public identity, "a form of self-aggrandizement."[175] Through aesthetic display, one could create a unique, fashionable identity and distinguish oneself from the masses.

Of all the expressions of the Aesthetic Movement, none summed up its principles more completely than the carefully arranged interior. Art journals and popular magazines, as well as the new interior design guides stressed the careful arrangement of bric-a-brac and choosing of wallpaper and art objects. These model interiors included the domestic spaces of wealthy patrons, often imagined by professional designers and executed by artists, and the more modest but still thoroughly curated spaces of the working-class parlor. However, the perfected Gilded Age interior was the artist's studio, which "became a showplace for its inhabitant's possessions as well as for his creations."[176] During a time when Americans could not consume enough media on the Aesthetic Movement, when masters of self-promotion like Wilde and Whistler were finding celebrity and success as aesthetes, and in an atmosphere where the decorated interior was considered the ultimate expression of the movement, William Merritt Chase strategized his own path to celebrity.

Becoming William Merritt Chase

Most of what we know about Chase's childhood comes through stories he later told to the press and his contemporary biographer – stories he constantly refined with the goal of reinforcing ideas about his innate artistic genius and inevitable rise to greatness. In

[174] Ibid., 25.
[175] Doreen Bolger Burke, et al., "Preface," in *In Pursuit of Beauty*, 19.
[176] Ibid.

telling the story of his youth, Chase stuck to a tried and true formula of popular biographical tropes. Historian Barbara Groseclose explained:

> In numbers significant enough to matter, artists' biographies . . . followed this pattern: a boy of humble origins reveals a gift for art in some homespun way, maybe drawing with a bit of charcoal on the hearth; he reaches maturity and begins to learn his craft, sometimes on the road and sometimes under a local practitioner; by dint of self improvement, he attains recognition and perhaps attends an academy in the United States or, more often, abroad; he ends his career as a respected, professional American artist.[177]

The story Chase wove for the public could not have better matched this formula. The boy of humble origins was born in 1849 in the small town of Williamsburg (later Nineveh), Indiana. His handpicked biographer Katherine Metcalf Roof, who was also a friend and former student, wrote of his home town, "It would be difficult to imagine an environment more remote from aesthetic suggestion that the small Western town of that period."[178] He revealed his gift for art via copies of "crude, naïve, preposterous chromos [color lithograph prints] that adorned the simple homes of the period."[179] Additionally, Roof continued, while "his attempts to draw began very early," he worked without "any painting materials" – essentially, with the "bit of charcoal on the hearth" described by Groseclose.[180] In the early 1860s, the Chase family moved to Indianapolis where the young artist's father opened a shoe store. Chase's father tried to start him in the family business, but Chase was consumed by drawing. He later recalled for the sake of the press: "One day my father came up to me and said, 'William, you have spoiled wrapping paper enough here. Put on your hat and come with me. I'm taking you to Hayes.'"[181] Hayes was Barton S. Hays, the "local practitioner" of some repute in Indianapolis. Chase studied with Hays for just over a year and in his telling was taught only "things which were of no earthly advantage to me as an art student."[182] In later versions of the story, Chase implied to the press that he quickly outpaced his teacher and that Hays provided only one "genuine service" to his career: "He advised my father to

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[177] Groseclose, 27.
[178] Roof, 1.
[179] Ibid., 2.
[180] Ibid.; Groseclose, 27.
[181] "W.M. Chase, The Noted Artist, Five of Whose Pictures Are at Herron Institute, Is Living Proof that Good Does Come Out of Brown County," *Indianapolis News*, December 15, 1906, 14, accessed August 2, 2020, Newspapers.com.
[182] Ibid.

send me to New York."[183] Starting in late 1869, Chase studied briefly at the National Academy of Design, but left for financial reasons in 1871, and "did not make himself felt in New York."[184] He moved to St. Louis where his parents had relocated and continued working on his art, mainly minutely detailed still lifes of flowers and fruit. True to the biographical trope described by Groseclose, he improved himself, won several awards, and secured several wealthy businessmen as patrons. These benefactors arranged for Chase to study abroad at the respected Royal Academy in Munich starting in the fall of 1872.[185]

At the Royal Academy, Chase experimented with technique, subject matter, and style, as well as notably appropriating the dark tones of the seventeenth-century Spanish and Dutch masters, mainly Diego Velázquez and Frans Hals.[186] He learned to paint in bold, confident strokes with large amounts of paint in an attempt to capture fleeting moments and gestures. He studied mainly under Karl Von Piloty, a painter of historical subjects considered a master at that time and known to American art audiences. Chase also learned from the German realist painter, Wilhem Leibl, who did not teach at the Academy but was influential locally. Leibl espoused the idea that artists could convey larger truths through technical excellence and that there was no need to beautify or add sentiment to a subject. If painted proficiently, Leibl taught, an artwork stands on its own. Chase also adopted and maintained for life, Leibl's *alla prima* style of applying wet paint on top of wet paint without waiting for layers to dry. This technique produced paintings that appeared sketch-like and unfinished to many American viewers accustomed to intricately detailed paintings. This ability to quickly capture a moment would become an essential part of Chase's success. Later in his career, Chase was able to capture on canvas every brush with celebrity, adventure in bohemia, or dalliance in New York Society and share it with the public.[187]

During these Munich years, Chase began to carefully and self-consciously create for himself an artist identity. That is, he manufactured an image reflecting cultural ideas about

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[183] Ibid.; Roof, 14.
[184] Roof, 24.
[185] Ibid.,14, 18, 22-24.
[186] See discussion of the influence of Frans Hals in the "Exhibition Stunt" section of the Conclusion.
[187] "In the World of Art," *New York Times*, January 5, 1896, 21, accessed August 2, 2020, New York Times Article Archive; "Great Artist's Struggle," *Indianapolis News*, January 14, 1899, 9, accessed August 2, 2020, Newspapers.com; "W.M. Chase, The Noted Artist," 14; Kenyon Cox, "William Merritt Chase, Painter," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 78 (March 1889): 550, accessed July 29, 2020, Hathi Trust Digital Library; Bryant, 29; Roof, 27, Pisano, *William Merritt Chase: A Leading Spirit in American Art*, 27-28.

what makes a great artist – uniqueness, eccentricity, taste, and innate genius for art. While still a student, Chase began to develop his attention-attracting, colorful persona, and to exhibit a flair for self-promotion and networking. He developed friendships with fellow students, including some who later found success in the American art world. These "Munich men" painted pictures of each other and formed art clubs and discussion groups. He flattered local art dealers with portraits and painted portraits of Piloty's children upon the teacher's request. He made etchings of his paintings that were easily reproduced in newspapers and magazines, giving his images a further reach and making the originals more recognizable and desirable.[188]

He also borrowed the "courtly and dignified" speech and mannerisms of the German artist Baron Hugo von Haberman.[189] More obviously, Chase appropriated Haberman's van dyke beard, red fez, and white coat. By crafting such an image, Chase delivered to an American public obsessed with European art, *their idea* of what an artist should look like. Most notable of all the endeavors of his students years, was the inauguration of his lifelong quest to collect beautiful art objects. While in Munich, Chase gathered objects like the bric-a-brac and extravagant trappings he saw in local artists' studios and in the backgrounds of their paintings. When he returned to New York, he would use this collection to create a studio right out of the collective American dream of how a studio should look.[190]

Chase not only worked on his persona, image, connections, and collections as a student, but he also worked hard on his art. He began sending some of his paintings back to the United States for exhibition and soon received some degree of notice. Chase won his first taste of celebrity with his painting *The Dowager* (1874).[191] Chase sent the portrait to one of his St. Louis patrons who, in turn, sent it to the 1875 exhibition of the National Academy of Design in New York City. The National Academy of Design, which had opened in 1826 as the premier American venue for training and exhibiting artists, lent prestige to those artists it deemed worthy of inclusion. By exhibiting the young artist's work, the Academy made Chase an artist to watch for the media and potential patrons. In an additional stroke of fortune, the famed American genre painter Eastman Johnson purchased

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[188] "Great Artist's Struggle," 9; "W.M. Chase, The Noted Artist," 14; Bryant, 28-35. Several of his fellow students became life-long friends and colleagues, including Frank Duveneck, Walter Shirlaw, and Frederick Dielman.
[189] Bryant, 32.
[190] Ibid.
[191] William Merritt Chase, *The Dowager*, 1874, oil on canvas, 36 ½ x 29 ¼ in. (92.7 x 74.3 cm.), location unknown, in Pisano, *William Merritt Chase: Portraits in Oil*, 5-6.

The Dowager for a sum exceeding the norm for student work. Johnson's interest and large payment were remarked upon in the newspapers and provided Chase with press he would not have otherwise received. It's likely that during this early brush with success, Chase recognized both the importance of media attention and of mixing with big name artists in attracting that attention.[192]

Chase's next success in garnering media attention had less to do with linking his name to that of a famous painter and more with aligning himself to the burgeoning Aesthetic Movement. Chase sent his painting *Keying Up – The Court Jester* (1875) to the influential 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, the event that launched the Aesthetic Movement in the United States.[193] A *New York Times* critic praised the coloring and "cleverly wrought" elements of the work painted in the "broad, dashy style of Piloty."[194] While this critic did link Chase to the better-known Piloty, he also associated the young artist with tenets of the Aesthetic Movement. The writer commented on both Americans' obsessive collecting of European art objects and the effect that this obsession with foreign art had on the American artist. After moderately praising Chase's work, the *New York Times* reporter explained what obstacles challenged the artist, namely the fact that American patrons were not supporting their homegrown artists. In fact, the critic noted, some American collectors "claimed their determination of never buying American pictures."[195] While the write-up was not exactly a rave review, Chase capitalized on the attention. In a wise move that demonstrated his understanding of the importance of mass media, he made an etching of *Keying Up* so he could widely distribute copies "to enhance recognition of the original and its painter."[196] As would remain true throughout his career, Chase did not let this moment, during which he had briefly captured media attention, pass without doing something to extend his press coverage.

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[192] Cox, 550; Pisano, *William Merritt Chase: Portraits in Oil*, 5-6; Groseclose, 10-11; Bryant, 22. Bryant cited several St. Louis newspaper articles from the Missouri Historical Society, clippings file.
[193] The Centennial Exhibition is discussed in the "From Revolution to Wallpaper" section earlier in this chapter.
[194] "The Art of America," *New York Times*, June 9, 1876, 1, accessed August 2, 2020, New York Times Article Archive; William Merritt Chase, *"Keying Up" – The Court Jester*, 1875, oil on canvas, 39 ¾ x 25 in. (101 x 63.5 cm.), Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, accessed July 29, 2020, https://www.pafa.org/museum/collection/item/keying-court-jester.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Bryant, 37-38.

After completing their studies at the Royal Academy in Munich, Chase and several of his fellow students visited Venice in the fall of 1877. Chase spent nine months there, intending to paint prolifically. Instead, he became life-threateningly ill and was unable to work. His colleagues, the artists Frank Duveneck and John Henry Twatchman, took turns taking care of him with their meager resources. Unable to create artwork, the group exhausted their financial resources and had to borrow money. [197] Even seriously ill and unable to paint, Chase worked to promote himself, sending his Munich work back to the U.S. for exhibition. He sent his painting *Ready for the Ride* (1877), which had received acclaim in Munich, to the art dealer Samuel P. Avery.[198] It's possible that this was in payment for educational, living, or travel costs as Avery was also one of his patrons, but undoubtedly Chase hoped for exhibition in the well-covered New York art shows.[199] Avery obliged.

In March 1878, *Ready for the Ride* and three other Chase paintings debuted at the seminal First Annual Exhibition of the Society of American Artists. The Society had formed the year before as an alternative to the more conservative National Academy of Design and as "a place where an artist whose work does not agree with the theories of Academicians may show to a curious public his own individuality in art."[200] Chase, and his Munich peers, made a modest but noticeable splash at the Society exhibition. Out of all of the paintings in the entire exhibition, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* mentioned one by Chase first and spent the most copy, still only a few sentences, on his works. The paper described *Ready for the Ride* as his best. The writer deemed the lines and coloring "remarkable," but implied that the style was derivative, stating, "he seems to have aimed at a Rembrandt effect" and "the old Dutch school is plainly visible."[201] About the other works, the paper described them only as "fine examples of the Munich school in which Chase has studied."[202] Similar to the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* reporter who implied that he was simply derivative of his influences, a reporter

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[197] "Society of American Artists," *New York Times*, March 7, 1878, 4, accessed August 2, 2020, New York Times Article Archive; Roof, 45-47, 50.
[198] Bryant, 43, 51; William Merritt Chase, *Ready for the Ride*, 1877, oil on canvas, 137.2 x 86.4 cm (54 x 34 in), Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, accessed July 29, 2020, https://collections.mfa.org/objects/600130.
[199] "Society of American Artists," 4. The *New York Times* reported that Avery owned *Ready for the Ride* and had also submitted it an exhibition at the Union League previous to the Society's exhibition.
[200] "Varnishing Day," *New York Times*, March 4, 1878, 4, accessed August 2, 2020, New York Times Article Archive.
[201] "The Society of American Artists," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 11, 1878, 2, accessed August 2, 2020, Newspapers.com.
[202] Ibid.

for the *New York Tribune* suggested that Chase had yet to develop his own signature style: "No one would suspect that these three pictures, each so individually characterized, are by the same hand."[203] The *New York Times* also delivered tempered praise, describing his works as uneven in "finish," by which the critic meant that they were not all fleshed out in enough detail or fully rendered. The *Times* reserved its greatest praise for *Ready for the Ride*, the only one of this works which the writer considered "carried as far in the direction of finish as any one could demand," but noted a "partisan objection" to the coloring.[204] Despite this criticism, the *Times* critic tentatively suggested that his "canvases here ought to be sufficient to establish his reputation in the United States as an able painter, who may be destined to produce great works."[205] In conclusion, New York newspapers described his work as relying on obvious influences, even to the extent of being derivative of those influences, and as lacking any kind of unique style. Critics concluded that he "ought to be . . . *may* be" successful.[206] The reviews were in. Chase was talented, but did not necessarily stand out from the pack.

Meanwhile, still in Venice but recovered from his illness, Chase managed to do some painting. He still had very little money and was reportedly subsisting almost entirely on beans.[207] Perhaps this reality check concerning the remunerative aspects of an artist's life explains why he accepted an offer to teach at the Art Students League in New York. The League was the newly founded, more modern alternative to the more established National Academy of Design.[208] By the summer of 1878, Chase decided to return to New York City.[209] This decision would have been exciting certainly, but the city would also have been intimidating to him for several reasons. First, Chase had already once tried to make a name for himself there as an artist. He spent almost two years in New York City starting in late 1869, studying under more established artists and taking classes at the National Academy of Design. He had tried exhibiting his work, but had garnered no attention and did not "make

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[203] "A New Art Departure," *New York Daily Tribune*, March 9, 1878, 5, accessed August 2, 2020, Chronicling America, Library of Congress.
[204] "Society of American Artists," *New York Times,* March 7, 1878, 4, accessed August 2, 2020, New York Times Article Archive.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Roof, 46.
[208] Groseclose, 30; Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist*, 28.
[209] "Literary Notes," *New York Times,* August 17, 1878, 3, accessed August 2, 2020, New York Times Article Archive.

himself felt in New York."[210] Second, he would likely have been excited that his name had made the newspapers, but he also would have been aware of the mixed reception of his work, possibly through Avery or another of his sponsors. While he had a glimpse of the importance of attracting media attention, the brief mentions of his work in a list of new artists would have only reinforced the fact that he would need to make a more significant statement to stand out among the myriad of new American artists. Chase would later quip: "Genius is only recognized in people who succeed."[211] Even if his work improved, even if he achieved artistic feats of "genius," he still faced the danger of obscurity if he failed to attract and engage the media.

Whatever his specific concerns or reasons, before he started his new life in New York City, Chase forged a plan that he hoped would distinguish him from other new artists and attract the press. While still in Venice, Chase conceptualized the lavish studio that would bring him celebrity. Despite his desperate financial situation, or perhaps explaining it, Chase purchased several art objects in Italy. He acquired "a number of valuable things, including pictures, among them some still-life studies, as well as brasses, old furniture and picture frames," and also a pair of live monkeys, "despite the conditions of his finances."[212] Just before his return to the United States, Chase declared to a fellow artist, "I intend to have the finest studio in New York."[213] He also wrote his sponsor, Samuel Avery, describing the art works and objects he had acquired and asking him if he knew where he could acquire a large studio.[214] Like Twain, Whitman, Wilde, and Whistler, William Merritt Chase identified a path to celebrity that capitalized on the rise of the Aesthetic Movement and the increasingly hungry mass media. Chase gambled on the idea that a lavish studio created in the image of aesthetic perfection and encapsulating Gilded Age dreams of the bohemian artist's life would be a spectacle the American press could not resist. The studio idea "possessed him"[215] While he gathered the paintings, sculptures, and bric-a-brac that would transform the large studio space he would soon acquire into the artistic mecca that would make him a celebrity, he could hardly have known just how quickly his gamble would pay

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[210] Roof 14, 18, 22-24.
[211] Pisano, *William Merritt Chase*, 76.
[212] Ibid., 47.
[213] Roof, 19, 51.
[214] Bryant, 51. Bryant cites an April 2, 1897 letter from Chase to Avery.
[215] Ibid. While he was planning some kind of stylized studio as early as 1878, Chase likely exaggerated the extent to which the studio was a well-planned, fully conceptualized artistic statement, in order to reinforce his genius.

off. The lavish Tenth Street Studio would distinguish him from his peers, grab the attention of the media, and capture the imagination of a nation obsessed with aestheticism. In late summer 1878, Chase sailed to New York City.

CHAPTER THREE: THE TENTH STREET STUDIO

> "The studio of an artist, as a general thing, is rather the index . . . to his intellectual leanings and particular taste." - John Moran, 1879. [216]

William Merritt Chase pulled white spats over shiny black shoes, donned a jeweled ring on the assigned finger of his left hand, twisted his mustache into perfect upturned points, and grabbed his spindly wicker cane.[217] It was summer, but the weather was cool over the Atlantic – the high winds would bring hurricanes by fall – so he also threw on his black overcoat and a brown fur hat before leaving his small cabin.[218] He was meeting James Carroll Beckwith, a fellow passenger by chance and fellow burgeoning artist also sailing from Europe back to the States to make his name in New York City. The two painters would have had much to talk about. They were both from the Midwest, both made an early failed attempt at breaking into the New York City art scene, both sought a more refined education in the academies of Europe, and both suffered a serious illness. The two artists discussed their concerns over taking new teaching positions and possibly even worked on sketches together as they did on a similar journey three years later when Beckwith created the drawings that would become his formal oil *Portrait of William Merritt Chase* (1881-

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[216] Moran, "Studio-Life in New York," 343.

[217] James Carroll Beckwith, *Portrait of William Merritt Chase,* 1881-1882, oil on canvas, 78 x 38 in., Indianapolis Museum of Art; Roof, 8, 261. This description of Chase's attire is drawn from Beckwith's *Portrait of William Merritt Chase*. Beckwith created the sketches for this painting not on the 1878 journey described here, but on one soon after. In examining photographs of Chase from this period and descriptions by Roof, it is likely that he was dressed extremely similarly during the 1878 journey. His was a carefully crafted appearance. The IMA gallery label for the painting states: "Beckwith recorded painter William Merritt Chase in dapper travel attire, including spats and a cane. An arresting passage of brushwork draws attention to the subject's bejeweled left hand." The label continues: "Upon completion of their studies abroad, Beckwith and Chase set sail for the United States 'to earn a living by their brushes,' in Beckwith's words. This 1878 transatlantic voyage cemented the artists' friendship. Beckwith began sketches for this portrait of his friend while they were on another journey back to Europe."

[218] Ibid.; Robert A. Hoover, "The Middle Atlantic Coast Hurricane of October 1878," *Weatherwise* 10, no. 4 (1957): 126-127, accessed July 29, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1080/00431672.1957.9940961; "Gale of 1878," Hurricane Archive, accessed September 15, 2019, https://www.wunderground.com/hurricane/atlantic/1878/Gale-of-1878. The description of the weather comes from Hoover, wind speed information comes from Weather Underground, and the description of the hat and coat are drawn from the Beckwith painting.

1882).[219] From descriptions of Chase in the time periods bookending this trip, it's also likely that the two indulged in "beer, pretzels, and radishes," or "pipes, beer, and cheese," or "sat up until all hours drinking beer, telling stories, and discussing the living subject of art."[220] Over the weeklong journey, perhaps while sketching in his second-class cabin, Chase continued planning the "bizarre effects" and "spectacles" that would, upon his arrival in the Big Apple, "set much journalistic talk and advertising in motion."[221] That is, he was planning his studio.

The Return

While "journalistic talk" was still forthcoming, the newspapers *had* begun to whisper. As noted previously, several New York newspapers made mention of the paintings he sent to the National Academy of Design and Society of American Artists exhibitions and bestowed modest praise. By the time the ship *Switzerland*, steamed toward New York City in August of 1878, the city's newspapers anticipated his arrival and announced his teaching appointment at the Art Students League.[222] The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, which had in March tepidly praised the work he had submitted to the Society exhibition, noted: "William M. Chase left Munich for the United States on the first of August, and he is expected to arrive in New York about the middle of the month."[223] The article continued in a tone both expectant and admonishing: "The Art Students League expect[s] great things from Chase, and it is to be hoped they will not be disappointed."[224] Like the coverage of his work in exhibitions, the articles that reported on his League appointment did so only in a long list of news and

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[219] Bryant, 50; Beckwith, *Portrait of William Merritt Chase*; *Manifest of all the Passengers Taken on Board the S. S. Belgenland*, September 28, 1881, New York Passenger and Crew List Number 1344, Lines 816-817, Microfilm Serial M237, accessed August 2, 2020, Ancestry.com. Information on the 1878 trip comes the IMA gallery label and from the September 1881 Passenger List of the ship Belgenland on its voyage form Antwerp to New York City. Bryant cites Beckwith's diary, which noted that the two artists worried that teaching would take away from their own painting time.
[220] Roof, 32, 77.
[221] Ibid., 55; Jean-Paul Rodrigue, "The Geography of Transport Systems," *Liner Transatlantic Crossing Times*, Department of Global Studies & Geography, Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY, accessed July 29, 2020, https://transportgeography.org/.
[222] Bryant, 51.
[223] "Fine Arts," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, August 9, 1878, 3, accessed August 2, 2020, Newspapers.com.
[224] Ibid. The wording implied a certain amount of skepticism on the part of the media and likely placed a degree of pressure on Chase to meet the expectations raised by the paintings that preceded the man.

gossip about a myriad of New York artists. Many of the artists named in these articles, and given an equal amount of ink, never found success. While these articles praised him as being "among the most prominent artists" contributing to current exhibits and securing prominent teaching positions, for Chase, they also likely reiterated the need he must have felt to stand out from the pack.[225]

The Tenth Street Studio Building

When Chase arrived in New York City, he acquired studio space on the first floor of the building at 51 West Tenth Street, between Fifth and Sixth Streets, widely considered one of the best studio locations in the city. American architect Richard Morris Hunt designed the building in 1857 as the first in the city to specifically cater to artists' needs for living quarters alongside studio and exhibition spaces. For most of the building's history, artists worked in sizable studios that surrounded an even larger communal exhibition space where the resident artists displayed their works in public receptions. This central, thirty by forty-foot gallery was two stories high and lit from above with natural light shining through glass skylights.[226]

In the 1860s, the popularity of group exhibitions declined and the central space went unused. The popular painter Albert Bierstadt, who had worked in the building since 1860, moved his studio into the exhibition space, allowing him to create his remarkably large landscapes of the American West.[227] Inexplicably, when Bierstadt moved his studio out of the building in 1878, the newly arrived and relatively unconnected Chase acquired this large, brightly lit space in addition to a standard-size studio. It is not clear how the new tenant acquired the desirable space over other better-known and longer-term residents, nor how he afforded it. New York newspapers reported that Chase arrived in mid-August with Art Students League classes starting early September.[228] This was not much time to secure any studio, let alone the lavish studio he imagined in Munich and Venice. Perhaps Samuel Avery, the influential art dealer and early advocate of Chase's work, acted on the

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[225] Ibid.
[226] Annette Blaugrund, *The Tenth Street Studio Building: Artist Entrepreneurs from the Hudson River School to the American Impressionists* (Southampton, NY: The Parrish Art Museum, 1997), 22.
[227] Ibid., 55.
[228] "Fine Arts," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, August 2, 1878, 3, accessed August 2, 2020, Newspapers.com; "Fine Arts," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, August 9, 1878, 3, accessed August 2, 2020, Newspapers.com.

newly arrived artist's behalf. Chase had written Avery in spring 1878 of his desire for a "furnished studio."[229] Or perhaps, the well-known artist Eastman Johnson helped Chase secure the space. In 1875, Johnson purchased an oil portrait by Chase and was likely the new arrival's most high-profile supporter in the area.[230] Johnson was also working in the Tenth Street Studio Building at the time of Chase's arrival.[231] No records have been located to definitively explain how the ambitious, but little-known artist managed to procure the "finest studio in New York."[232] While not contributing any clarity to the mystery, Charles Miller, a painter and member of the National Academy of Design, summed up the significance of Chase's acquisition most colorfully, stating: "Mr. Chase upon returning to New York virtually took the town by storm, capturing its chief artistic citadel, and the exhibition gallery of the Tenth Street Studio building."[233] Regardless of the logistics, this seizure of the large exhibition space was truly a coup, and Chase would capitalize on it to the fullest extent possible.

Studio as Spectacle: Early Press Coverage

Chase's press coverage changed in a noticeable and permanent way only a few months after he arrived in New York. From this point forward, in almost any article of even modest length, the writer always mentioned Chase's studio. Usually the studio got more ink than the art or artist. In December 1878, the *New York Daily Herald* reported: "William M. Chase is now thoroughly at home in his studio, in which he has grouped a number of oil studies and pictures by well known Munich hands and by himself, together with a lot of picturesque art properties and bric-a-brac."[234] The article noted several paintings displayed in the studio, and described one with some detail. He reported that the work depicted "a

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[229] John Davis, "William Merritt Chase's International Style," in *William Merritt Chase: A Modern Master,* edited by Elsa Smithgall, Erica E. Hirshler, Katherine M. Bourguignon, Giovanna Ginex, and John Davis (New Haven and London, UK: The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC in association with Yale University Press, 2017), 59. Davis cites an April 2, 1878 letter from William Merritt Chase to Samuel P. Avery.
[230] Pisano, *Portraits in Oil*, 5-6. Eastman Johnson purchased Chase's painting *Portrait of a Man in Shadow* (1873) after its exhibition at the 1875 exhibition of the National Academy of Design.
[231] Annette Blaugrund, "Tenth Street Roster Update," *American Art Journal* 17, No. 1 (Winter 1985): 84-6, accessed July 29, 2020, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1594309.
[232] Roof, 51.
[233] Roof, 28, 56.
[234] "Fine Arts," *New York Daily Herald*, December 23, 1878, 9, accessed August 2, 2020, Newspapers.com.

group of painters in Middle Age costumes seated and standing about a studio table examining etchings and engravings."[235] This choice of subject would become notable in light of impending developments, namely the burgeoning public interest in artists' studios. And while Chase quickly abandoned the historical motifs he had inherited from his Munich teachers, he would soon expand on the theme of the studio interior. Chase recognized the press's interest both in his studio and in his painting a studio motif. His work would soon reflect this lesson. What he could not have anticipated was that press coverage of his studio and its contents would soon eclipse that of his artwork, but he would quickly adapt.

Studio as Celebrity

By 1879, almost every article mentioning Chase included a description of his studio. For example, in January of that year, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* reported on the first reception of the Art Students League that included a number of paintings by burgeoning artists, including Chase. The newspaper listed and described several of the paintings and noted other upcoming exhibitions. The article then jumped from these drab listings to a colorful and enthusiastic description of Chase's studio. The *Eagle* reported: "William M. Chase has one of the finest studios in New York. It is crowded with all sorts of artistic furniture, old china, bric a brac and a hundred things to delight the hearts of his artist friends when they chance to visit him."[236] Of Chase's art displayed at the exhibition, the newspaper said only: "There was also exhibited . . . a sketch in charcoal by William Merritt Chase."[237] Chase could not have failed to notice that the studio received more coverage than either his role at the League or his artistic contribution to the exhibit. In an article with no information about any of the artists and only a meager description of his work, there was an entire paragraph on the space where he created that work. Chase's Tenth Street Studio had begun to capture the art world's attention, perhaps at the expense of his artwork.

In March 1879, New York and Boston newspapers reported on the upcoming "American Artists" issue of the magazine *Wide Awake*. The *Buffalo Commercial* reported that the April issue would describe "with unction the studio and 'properties' of William M. Chase,

[235] Ibid.
[236] "Art Notes," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle,* January 12, 1879, 3, accessed August 2, 2020, Newspapers.com.
[237] Ibid.

one of the cleverest of our newly-returned painters."[238] The *Boston Post* also reported on the featured artists of the issue: "The first is a sketch of Mr. William M. Chase, illustrating his career as an artist, written by Mr. S. G. W. Benjamin, and accompanied by a portrait and studio drawn in pen and ink by Mr. Chase himself."[239] In much the same way that Chase had created a drawing of *The Jester* after it received an iota of press coverage in order to encourage wider reproduction of the image, Chase created a drawing of what was now garnering him the most coverage – the studio.

S. G. W. Benjamin, the author of the *Wide Awake* article, also contributed a chapter on Chase for the book *Our American Artists* published in the same year, 1879. Benjamin wrote: "His studio . . . in the Tenth Street Studio Building . . . is one of the most artistic in the country, for the artist brought home with him a great variety of curious and interesting objects which he picked up abroad."[240] In addition to "wonderful bits of old bronze and beautifully carved oaken chests," Benjamin reported on "faded tapestries that might tell strange stories, quaint decorated stools, demaskeened blades and grotesque flint-locks, and elaborately carved mugs and salvers, are picturesquely arranged around the studio with a studied carelessness . . . . It is altogether a nook rich in attractions which carry the fancy back to other climes and the romance of bygone ages."[241] By this time, at the height of the Aesthetic Movement when the artfully arranged room was the very embodiment of taste, the public could not get enough of the media descriptions of Chase's studio.

Towards the end of 1879, the *Art Journal* published the most thorough description of the studio to date in an article that introduced the themes that would define Chase's press coverage for the next several decades. This magazine, published in London, circulated internationally and was probably the most popular and influential art publication of the Victorian Era/Gilded Age. John Moran, the article's author (and a photographer who worked in Philadelphia for much of his career), presented his readers with a vivid and detailed description of Chase's studio. Moran's article, which began with an extensive inventory of the room's contents, was tinged with a breathless and awed tone. He spent several pages

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[238] "Literary: Important Announcements from Leading Publishing Houses," *Buffalo Commercial*, March 26, 1879, 1, accessed August 2, 2020, Newspapers.com. The *Commercial* described *Wide Awake's* audience as "children, and also those grown-up children, the poets and artists."
[239] "The Magazines," *Boston Post*, March 20, 1879, 3, accessed August 2, 2020, Newspapers.com.
[240] S. G. W. Benjamin, *Our American Artist* (Boston: D. Lothrop & Co., 1879), [32], accessed July 29, 2020, Hathi Trust Digital Library.
[241] Ibid.

listing "a multitude of miscellaneous bric-a-brac," such as a stuffed raven, old bronze lanterns, Japanese umbrellas, ancient books, Egyptian pots, bouquets of paint brushes, crucifixes and "strange little carvings of saints," a Puritan hat, Italian court swords, Venetian tapestries, pistols, bugles, East Indian drums, a Renaissance era chest, Persian incense lamp, the head of a polar bear, a bronze bust of Voltaire, a Spanish donkey blanket, a dried devil-fish, an early seventeenth-century stained glass window from Northern Germany, "and so on ad infinitum."[242] According to twentieth-century art historian Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr., the "breathlessly detailed accounting" was "an indication both of the wonderment that the innumerable delights of Chase's studio produced upon the contemporary sensibility, and of its novelty" as "the first of its kind on such a scale."[243] In addition to presenting this inventory of aesthetic perfection, Moran introduced two lasting ideas about Chase's Tenth Street wonderland: the studio as bohemia and the studio as genius manifest.

A Gentleman's Bohemia

For the first of his durable concepts, Moran presented the idea that Chase's atelier was a sort of magical bohemia where one could briefly leave behind the cares of respectable society and flirt with the modest danger of the artist's world. Moran imbued each artifact with a romantic and exotic story, adding intrigue to Chase as the strange, but brilliant composer of the tableaux. Moran implied that the objects brought with them to Chase's studio their pasts and the adventurous and risqué exploits to which they were privy. For example, Moran described a simple antique bench sitting under a grouping of "paraphernalia of warfare" along with some examples of women's shoe fashions as relics of past scandal and adventure.[244] He postulated,

> Under these [weapons], on the ground, stands a carved chest of the Renaissance period, such as was used in the hallways of Venetian palaces as a seat. Doubtless could it speak, it could tell strange tales; it has heard many a page whisper soft speeches in the ears of pretty, black-eyed tirewomen, men-at-arms telling of their doughty deeds, or assassins plotting some secret crime. . . . On the floor beside it lies a unique collection of women's foot-gear, dainty little slippers of green and blue velvet, with gold and silver embroideries, that have graced the feet of some sultana or favourite of the harem."[245]

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[242] Moran, "Studio-Life in New York," 343-45.
[243] Nicolai Cikovsky, "William Merritt Chase's Tenth Street Studio," *Archives of American Art Journal* 16, No. 2 (1976): 2-14, accessed July 29, 2020, JSTOR.
[244] Moran, "Studio-Life in New York," 345.
[245] Ibid.

For this Gilded Age writer, the objects brought their bohemian adventures with them from the edge of impropriety to Tenth Street.

Moran conveyed to his reader a space where the sacred was spiced with a hint of the profane, a common but surprising aspect of nineteenth-century ideas of artistic bohemia. On passing through the larger studio into the smaller, Moran described a transition akin to walking through a bustling Turkish spice market and into a small, quiet candle-lit chapel, though a chapel dedicated to art rather than God. Moran wrote:

> This door brings one mysteriously to a small flight of stairs leasing to a small gallery, which contains a sofa and an organ. It is a perfect littler bower, and from it the entire studio can be overlooked, and a most exquisite effect caught. A solemn, almost religious feeling comes over one when, with the church draperies and church lamps and burning incense around him, he sits in the subdued light below, and hears the organ sounding from above, now in a nocturne of Chopin, now in a sonata of Beethoven, now in a portion of a mass by Mendelssohn.[246]

Chase's bohemia offered escape, intrigue, and perhaps a dash of provocative danger, all without threatening the social standing of his visitors because Chase himself was a gentleman who would allow no more than a novel tinge of impropriety.

The twisting, circuitous path through Chase's candle-lit bohemia was the low road travelled mainly by artists, poets, and writers, but was available to the society gentleman or woman in-the-know. Moran wrote that the Tenth Street Studio "presents many phases prolific in interest to those who love to wander from the high-road and seek in the lanes and byways of Bohemian or quasi-Bohemian life for scenes and suggestions which 'respectability in a thousand gigs' cannot furnish."[247] The socially acceptable version of bohemia represented by the artist's studio stood in contrast to the disreputable bohemia epitomized by the opium den or the den of iniquity. The artist's studio was seen as the playground not of the deviant, but of the gentleman looking for a break from the demands of everyday life. Moran wrote:

> Those who know the way to them, and the ways of them, find the studios, 'roadside dwells of rest,' especially if one be of a temperament at all artistic, or follow a calling in any way analogous to that of the painter. One gets tired of the dusty tramp and dreary round, of the monotony of his social

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[246] Ibid.; Roof, 72, 157. Chase's studio had at least one piano and an organ that studio visitors, fellow artists, and students would play during gatherings, as noted in Roof and depicted in several paintings.

[247] Moran, 343. Moran does not give the source of his quotation about respectability, but it seems likely that it is from a much-quoted essay by Thomas Carlyle.

> surroundings and daily prosaic life, with its formal gatherings and stereotyped appointments, or, it may be, one hardly realizes the sameness of scene and stagnation of temperature which surround him, until he climbs the stairs of some colony of artists and enjoys a quiet smoke with new relish in a rarefied aesthetic atmosphere, and in the presence of 'such stuff as dreams are made of.'[248]

Chase's studio represented many different things to the many people reading Moran's article. It was the *au courant* embodiment of aestheticism. It promised an alluring adventure. It offered an escape from reality and the pressures of modern life. And it stood as the sanctum of authentic artistic creation. Whatever salacious connotations the artist's workshop held, the studio still retained its position as a sacred space "where men are supposed to evolve the highest that is in them."[249] The Tenth Street Studio maintained this hallowed status because Chase produced technically proficient and award-winning paintings that were gaining the respect of high society and respected art organizations. While the studio could serve as an exciting escape for the cultured gentleman or lady, it remained respectable as the site of the aesthetic achievements of its artistic oligarchy.

Studio as Genius Manifest

The second concept presented by Moran that would have lasting significance was the idea that the studio could represent, or stand in for, the artist himself. Chase would soon internalize and apply this idea to his business decisions, relationships with colleagues, interactions with the press, and even his paintings. Moran put into clear words what newspaper articles hinted at: the artfully arranged studio could stand in for the genius of the artist. Moran claimed, "The studio of an artist, as a general thing, is rather the index . . . to his intellectual leanings and particular taste."[250] He continued to report that a discerning artist held "severely decorative principles, and has everything arranged in his room – draperies, pictures, pottery, bric-a-brac – with a definite view to its relative effect."[251] Moran explained that while many people might collect aesthetic objects as contemporary fashion required, only a brilliant artist could arrange such objects into a cohesive whole, turning the entire space into a work of art. In fact, in this age dominated by aesthetic principles, no higher accomplishment than the artfully designed room was possible. A visitor to Chase's

[248] Ibid.
[249] Ibid.
[250] Ibid., 343.
[251] Ibid.

studio would have been "struck on entering by the restful sense of harmony in colour . . . by the apparently fortuitous arrangement of line, drapery, and grouping, which never suggests an awkwardness."[252] Moran concluded, "You cannot tell, you do not want to tell, how the effect has been arrived at."[253] Chase just had "the gift, the knack" for arranging objects in a congruous harmony.[254] Moran explained that a visitor would take in the scene, "now lighting on this object now on that, till the wonder is excited how constituents so multifarious and seemingly incongruous can make up such a delightful ensemble."[255] In this laudatory article, Moran presented Chase not as a brilliant painter, but a master arranger of objects in a studio that defined aesthetic perfection. In fact, Chase's paintings were barely mentioned. Only *Ready for the Ride* (1877) was referred to by name and only at the very end of the lengthy article. Chase must have ruminated deeply on this first article in a major art publication, an article that focused for pages on his studio and dedicated only a single sentence to describing one artwork. In response, Chase would soon find a way to use the studio to point back to himself as its creator.[256]

Moran's article illustrated how well Chase tuned the cultural notes he struck with his studio to the resounding reverberations of the aesthetic trends and values that Americans equated with taste, even genius. The Aesthetic Movement at this time "affected all levels of society in America" and was embodied most completely by the carefully arranged interior, especially the artist's studio.[257] For example, the same year that Chase secured his space in the Tenth Street Studio Building, a decorating guide by prolific American writer Harriet Prescott Spofford explained the importance of decorating elaborately with an assortment of objects expertly arranged in aesthetic harmony. Successfully displayed, such objects showed that the owner exemplified culture and taste, and possibly even genius. Spofford wrote, "Taste, after all, as we have said, the offspring of genius and tact, is the great secret of the art of furnishing."[258] Thus, a tasteful room of bric-a-

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[252] Ibid.
[253] Ibid., 344.
[254] Ibid.
[255] Ibid.
[256] Foucault, 115. This concept of the author including elements in his work that pointed back to himself is drawn from Foucault. See discussion in Chapter One: Historiography.
[257] Stein, 19.
[258] Harriet Prescott Spofford, *Art Decoration Applied to Furniture* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1878), 231, accessed August 9, 2020, Hathi Trust Digital Library.

brac showed the decorator to be a cosmopolitan person of genteelness, brilliance, talent, and refinement – the very image Chase was working to cultivate.[259]

Chase was not the first American artist to create a lavish studio. Art world giants such as landscape painters Albert Bierstadt and Frederick Church were using large studios to work on commissions and to receive wealthy patrons in appropriately aesthetic settings.[260] Their surroundings reflected their success. When Chase moved into the Tenth Street Studio, he had just finished art school, was only one year removed from living in poverty in Venice, and needed to take a teaching job to make ends meet. He had few commissions and relied on his income from the Art Students League. Unlike the workspaces of Bierstadt and Church, Chase's sumptuous, aesthetically ideal studio did not in any way reflect his current economic or professional status. Instead, Chase used the studio to project an image of a successful, cosmopolitan artist to the media. In short, he employed a kind of "fake it 'til you make it" approach to constructing his public image.

The Tile Club: Aesthetes, Bohemians, and Shameless Self-Promoters

If the recent newspaper articles covering his studio and its contents had demonstrated to Chase that his workspace was drawing more media attention than his artwork, the multi-page, illustrated *Art Journal* article that detailed its complete contents must have done the trick. From this point onwards, Chase found ways to use the studio to promote his work and himself as an artist available for commissions. After all, in order to make a living as an artist, he needed to sell paintings.[261]

One traditional method for promoting oneself as an artist was to angle for admittance to an established art organization. The most prominent such organization in New York City was the National Academy of Design. The Academy, established in 1825 by the country's most prominent artists, was not only the premier coterie of the artistic elite, but also a museum and school.[262] Ostensibly, membership in the Academy would have been

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[259] Ibid., 237.
[260] Blaugrund, "Tenth Street Roster Update," 64-71.
[261] Most American artists at this time had to do illustrations for books and magazines or teach classes. Chase felt illustration as beneath his talents, and so reluctantly chose teaching. He grew into the job and would eventually become one of the most renowned and beloved art teachers in the country.
[262] Annette Blaugrund, "Foreword," in *Painting and Sculpture in the Collection of the National Academy of Design, Volume I, 1826-1925,* ed. David Dearinger (New York and Manchester: Hudson Hills Press, 2004), xvii; National Academy of Design, "Historical Overview," accessed August 2, 2020, https://www.nationalacademy.org/historical-overview/.

ideal for Chase's career. Admittance would have secured him space at the regular exhibitions, which, in turn, led to attention, prestige, and sales. The connections made at the Academy would also help secure patrons and much needed commissions. While Chase did submit work to the National Academy of Design exhibitions, he did not seek membership until much later in his career.[263] Instead, almost immediately upon his arrival in New York, he became a member of a small, obscure, and rather informal organization known as the Tile Club. The club had formed in 1877, only one year before his arrival.[264] While it may seem strange that Chase would pick such an esoteric, fledgling organization, we can be sure from his actions up to this point that he made no unstudied decisions in regards to his career. While the Tile Club was new and untried, it had one thing that none of the other more established groups could claim: members of the media as members.

New York Sun writers Edward Strahan (a pen name for art critic Earl Shinn) and William Mackay Laffan served as the "club scribes," recording the actions of the club that were designed for media consumption.[265] Almost everything we know about the Tile Club comes from the articles written by these scribes and published in popular journals like *Scribner's Monthly, Harper's Weekly,* and *Century Magazine* between 1879 and 1884 and from *The Book of the Tile Club* (1886), which was written and illustrated by club members.[266] These articles were intended to increase the renown and the mystique of the club and would be poor sources for an objective study of the organization, but for a look into how the club intended to shape its own image, these sources are ideal. The Tile Club combined all of the elements that Chase had already identified as necessary for commercial success. First, its members, the Tilers, embraced the trend of aestheticism and advocated for American art. Second, the organization was composed of well-known and up-and-coming

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[263] National Academy of Design, "All National Academicians (1825-Present)," accessed August 2, 2020, https://www.nationalacademy.org/all-national-academicians/. Chase became an Associate Academician in 1880 and a National Academician in 1890.

[264] W. MacKay Laffan, "The Tile Club at Work," *Scribner's Monthly* 17, no. 3 (January 1879): 402, accessed August 2, 2020, Hathi Trust Digital Library. In this introductory article to the club, member and writer Laffan explained that the founding meeting occurred in the fall of 1877.

[265] Roof, 76; Ronald G. Pisano, "Decorative Age of Decorative Craze? The Art and Antics of the Tile Club (1877-1887)," in *The Tile Club and the Aesthetic Movement in America,* ed. Ronald G. Pisano (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1999), 13-14. Roof called the writers the "club scribes" in her biography. Pisano identified and matched the Tilers names and pseudonyms.

[266] Edward Strahan and F. Hopkinson Smith, *A Book of the Tile Club* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1886), *passim*. The journal articles will be noted and discussed individually in the following pages and are listed in the bibliography.

artists. Last, and most important, the Tile Club was a direct line to the art-buying public via its media members. In short, the Tilers capitalized on the public thirst for all things aesthetic with the goal of combating the public's penchant for foreign art over American.

The Tile Club in the Age of Aesthetics

The Tilers created their club for the explicit purpose of exploiting the aesthetic craze, albeit with a tongue-in-cheek approach that recognized the extreme consumerism driving the trend. While the artist members were, in some aspects, genuinely influenced by the Aesthetic Movement, they also recognized it as a fad. In the first journal article covering the new organization, which appeared in *Scribner's Monthly* in January 1879, writer-member Laffan reconstructed, undoubtedly with embellishment, the club's first meeting at which they decided on their mission. One of the club's artists purportedly began: "This is a decorative age . . . . We should do something decorative, if we would not be behind the times."[267] To which another artist argued, "Stuff! It will all be over soon. It is only a temporary craze, a phase of popular insanity that will wear itself out . . . . Of course it has interfered with the sale of our pictures."[268] This last statement again referred to the extreme commercialism of the aesthetic trend and the American consumer's taste for European art to the detriment of the American artist's income.

The article went on to tell an apocryphal version of how the members chose to paint tiles as opposed to perusing any of the other decorative arts.[269] According to Laffan, "an artist of architectural proclivities," who was likely the expatriate architect Edward Wimbridge, stated: "Tiles are what we need. The element of color and variety is lost in the decorative details of our structures. There is no object that so readily supplies this deficiency . . . . Let us do tiles!"[270] In an exchange that shows the humorous attitude of this group in the face of difficult financial times for American artists, one member asked what they would do with the tiles after they were painted, to which another replied sardonically,

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[267] Laffan, "The Tile Club at Work," 401.
[268] Ibid.
[269] Ibid., 402. The Tilers purportedly debated creating frescoes, designs for textiles, and wallpaper before deciding on textiles.
[270] Ibid.; "Appendix: Members of the Tile Club and Their Known Sobriquets" in *The Tile Club and the Aesthetic Movement in America,* ed. Ronald G. Pisano (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1999), 103.

"Why, just what you do with the pictures you paint . . . keep them."[271] After another member explained the recent elevation of tiles from pedestrian craft to fine art by English artists over the previous decade, it was settled. They would paint tiles. Tiles were as good a symbol for the group's tongue-in-cheek aesthetic goals as any other craft.

Meetings were held Wednesdays at various members' studios. The host of the evening's tile work kept the output of the evening in return for providing cheese, crackers, sardines, tobacco, cider, and inks. Membership was strictly limited to twelve invited members and there were no officers or dues. There were only two rules beyond the limited membership. First, the host member could serve only snacks, no full meals. Only once was this rule violated and the host harshly reprimanded – after the Tilers ate all of the food.[272] Second, the Tilers went by aliases, at least in print. That is, in journal articles and in the *Book of the Tile Club*, the writer-members identified the artists only with colorful pseudonyms. [273] These nicknames referenced the artists' personalities or painting styles, and added mystique and intrigue, which they hoped would generate more interest in their work. The members also felt that this bit of creative fiction lent a "studiously slangy and Bohemian" atmosphere to the club.[274]

These bohemian nicknames pretended at only the thinnest veil of anonymity. The pseudonyms were in no way confounding to informed readers of cultural journals like *Scribner's*. They were just good fun. In contrast to the journals, newspapers that covered the exploits and exhibitions of the Tile Club used the given names of the artist-members. For example, the *Boston Globe* reported on the first *Scribner's* article "The Tile Club at Work," openly naming the members. The newspaper explained that the author of the journal article, W. M. Laffan, described "the methods of an association of artists and others, whose works include drawings by A. Abbey, W. M. Chase, and others."[275] In a similar article, the *Detroit Free Press*, expanded on the list of Tile Club members, noting that the *Scribner*'s

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[271] Laffan, "The Tile Club at Work," 402. Wimbridge's point was that they couldn't sell their paintings because of the American consumer's preference for European art, and so they kept them.
[272] Ibid., 403.
[273] Ibid., 402; "Appendix: Members of the Tile Club and Their Known Sobriquets," 103. Pisano painstakingly connected each Tiler's pseudonym with his given name in the appendix of a collection of essays on the Tile Club published in conjunction with a related exhibition at The Museums at Stony Brook (now the Long Island Museum of American Art, History, and Carriages, Stony Brook, NY.)
[274] Strahan and Smith, *A Book of the Tile Club*, 9.
[275] "Scribner's Monthly," *Boston Globe*, December 16, 1878, 3, accessed August 2, 2020, Newspapers.com.

article contained "drawings by E. A. Abbey (a tiled mantle-piece), W. M. Chase, Hopkinson Smith, Winslow Homer, Alden Weir, Reinhart, Quarterly, Wimbridge, Laffan and Paris, and a tile in relief by O'Donovon, the sculptor."[276] This article named eleven of twelve members and like articles ran in newspapers across the country in December of 1878. New York newspapers, too, including the *Brooklyn Union* and *New York Daily Herald*, named the club members.[277] Even if the readers of the *Scribner's* journal articles on the Tile Club didn't also read the newspaper coverage of the group, they could probably identify most of the members. While the writers of the journal articles employed the aliases, the members were clearly depicted in the rich and numerous illustrations that accompanied the articles. The Tilers drew and painted each other in their identifiable garb and detailed each other's well-known features. When the illustrations depicted the surrounding landscape or townsfolk, instead of the club members, the artists autographed their work with a large identifiable signature. In short, the art-interested public knew the identity of each Tile Club member. The pseudonyms fooled no one, nor were they meant to do so. They were a publicity stunt.

Bohemia Comes to New York City

Tile Club members were hyper-aware of the preoccupation by the media and the public with an imagined bohemia. They understood that aligning themselves with popular ideas about bohemia would be enticing to the media and to patrons. And while they worked to capitalize on public infatuation with aesthetic and bohemian trends, they were drawn together through sincere camaraderie. The young members of the Tile Club shared a desire to create the "artistic atmosphere to which they had grown accustomed in Munich and Paris."[278] The desire to achieve commercial success drove them to act in the public arena. Members of all art organizations from the lauded National Academy of Design to the "slangy" Tile Club were hoping their affiliation with their chosen organization would result in sales, patrons, and commissions. The young, emerging artists that made up the Tile Club could not rely on the prestige of the Academy or other accredited art organizations to which they were denied admission because of their inexperience or they avoided because of an

[276] "The Magazines," *Detroit Free Press*, December 19, 1878, 6, accessed August 2, 2020, Newspapers.com.
[277] "Scribner for 1879," *Brooklyn Union*, December 14, 1878, 2, accessed August 2, 2020, Newspapers.com; "Fine Arts," *New York Daily Herald*, December 16, 1878, 8, accessed August 2, 2020, Newspapers.com.
[278] Roof, 83.

incompatible vision for the future of art. Instead, the Tilers hoped to draw patrons by offering them the spectacle of bohemia.[279]

The French writer Henri Murger popularized and romanticized the cultural idea of bohemia in a series of stories published in the mid-1840s that detailed the lives of artists and writers living in the Latin Quarter of Paris. In these articles, and the widely popular Puccini opera *La Vie Bohème,* which drew from them, a group of "bohèmes" lived wildly and freely for art and love, in contrast to "le bourgeois" who worked for money and property at the expense of life experiences.[280] In her book *Bohemia in America*, historian Joanna Levin explains that Murger's bohemians "spurred countless representations and lived experiences, inspiring endless convolutions of art imitating life and life imitating art."[281] Bohemia captured first the European and then the American imagination. The popular idea of bohemia then manifested as real world colonies of artists, writers, and intellectuals.

One of the most robust reinterpretations of French bohemia began in New York City in the late 1850s. These self-identified American bohemians met regularly at Pfaff's beer cellar. The group was gathered by Henry Clapp Jr., a Boston journalist who had recently returned from Paris, bringing *la vie bohème* with him. Among the journalists, artists, and poets gathered at Pfaff's was the poet Walt Whitman who in the early 1860s penned (but never completed) a poem called "The Vault at Pfaff's."[282] Despite Murger's statement that "Bohemia only exists and is only possible in Paris," Americans appropriated the concept, became enraptured in its romance, and used it not only to criticize mainstream bourgeois values, but also to negotiate cultural borders and define new aesthetic concepts.[283]

There were two defining characteristics of the more moderate American bohemia that distinguished it from its more radical French antecedent. First, bohemian artists, writers, and thinkers in the U.S. critiqued bourgeois values only mildly in contrast to the rebuke issued by their French counterparts. Second, while French mainstream, middle-class

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[279] Linda Henefeld Skalet, "Bohemians and Businessmen: American Artists' Organizations of the Late Nineteenth Century," in *The Tile Club and the Aesthetic Movement in America*, ed. Ronald G. Pisano (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1999), 85-95.
[280] Henry Murger, *The Latin Quarter: Scènes de la Vie de Bohème*, trans. Ellen Marriage and John Selwin (1851, reprinted London, UK: Grant Richards, 1901), accessed August 2, 2020, Internet Archive. The stories were serialized in the magazine *Le Corsaire* in the 1840s before being collected for publication as a novel in 1851.
[281] Joanna Levin, *Bohemia in America, 1858-1920* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 1-2.
[282] Ibid., 5.
[283] Ibid.

culture relegated its bohémes to the fringe of society, the American bourgeois eventually accepted and even celebrated its bohemians. In fact, the version of bohemia accepted by Americans was the one presented by its genteel artists. By the 1870s, "the romance of Bohemia . . . had become more broadly disseminated throughout the United States."[284] It was no longer the domain of only the starving artist, but was "entering both art studios and genteel drawing rooms, leaky garrets and opulent club rooms, popular novels and literary magazines."[285] Bohemianism in the U.S. pushed against boundaries of convention and challenged bourgeois ideas, but was accepted and even admired by mainstream Americans by the height of the Gilded Age, in large part because of its embrace by American artists.

The American concept, as presented by fictional and nonfictional journal articles and novels, presented bohemia as a space of tension: between the bourgeois and the artist; between men and women; between long-held socially acceptable ideas about women's roles and a more liberal, permissive femininity; between "propriety and license;" between rural and cosmopolitan; and between the traditional and the risqué.[286] For many artists and writers, bohemia was an imagined, abstract space, which could be continuously redefined and made challenging to the cultural consensus.[287] For Chase and the other Tilers, bohemia was all of these, but it was also a physical, material place as manifested in their studios. With the creation of these lavish aesthetic statements, and more specifically, with the lush descriptions of such spaces by the press, bohemia also became real to the American public. This magical realm of license could be found in the studios of New York City. Finally, one could visit bohemia.

The Tile Club at Work in Bohemia

American bohemia began both as a fictional, imagined realm informed by the real life happenings of artists in the New York studios, as well as real, physical spaces imbued with the fictional musings of the Gilded Age imagination. Regardless of where it existed on this spectrum, bohemia was never more tangible than it was in the art studios of New York,

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[284] Ibid.
[285] Ibid., 6.
[286] Ibid., 3-6. Levin wrote, "Bohemia is either identified with one of these binary terms or it functions as a third term, capable of mediating (if only temporarily) between these conflicting forces." For example, when the conflict was between traditional rural values and shifting cosmopolitan ideals, bohemia would be identified with the latter. However, within metropolitan New York, bohemia "explicitly sought to counteract the cultural hegemony of the Northeast."
[287] Ibid., 8.

where young artists with new ideas about creating art for its own sake lived in near poverty to pursue artistic and aesthetic ideals. And no group of artists reflected ideas about bohemia as clearly as the Tilers, whose ostentatious parties and wild antics pushed the boundaries of the socially acceptable and whose adventures allowed for an escape from social norms. The journal articles covering these adventures, as written by the reporter-members, combined descriptions of the artistic atmosphere of the Tile Club meetings with a foggy, imagined nostalgia – a longing for an imagined earlier and simpler period where artists lived only for their art, innocent of commercialism. According to Chase scholar and curator Ronald Pisano, "in the media at least, the art world of real New York and imagined bohemia most vividly resembled each other."[288] Since for most people bohemia was largely imaginary, it had to be performed. Pisano continued: "The construction of bohemia in late nineteenth-century America involved fabricating a stage or arena for its display."[289] The stage was the media. In their performance of bohemia for *Scribner's* and other popular journals, the Tilers encapsulated the bohemian art life as one of "youthful dreams, picturesque poverty, good fellowship, high spirits, and high ideals"[290] An identification with the bohemian was good for artists' business and attracted patrons to their alluring studios positioned at the very edge of propriety.[291]

Chase was not included in the first article on the Tile Club, the previously mentioned "The Tile Club at Work," because it covered only the first meeting of the group, which took place in 1877 when he was still in Europe.[292] (Chase joined sometime during the winter of 1878-79.) Nonetheless, when the article came out in *Scribner's* in January 1879, the article included a drawing by Chase. He chose to contribute a print of a cockatoo. This bird was one of the more recognizable residents of his Tenth Street Studio, as well as a subject of his painting *The Turkish Page (*Cincinnati Art Museum, 1876), which had already garnered some media attention.[293] At three different points in her contemporary biography, Roof

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[288] Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist*, 251.
[289] Ibid., 247.
[290] Ibid., 247.
[291] Skalet, 92-95.
[292] Laffan, "The Tile Club at Work," 401-09.
[293] Roof, 42; William Merritt Chase, *The Turkish Page (Unexpected Intrusion),* 1876, oil on canvas, 42 ¼ x 37 3/16, Cincinnati Art Museum, accessed August 2, 2020, http://www.cincinnatiartmuseum.org/art/explore-the-collection?id=17994029. The title of the painting changed over time. Early newspapers referred to it as *Boy Feeding a Cockatoo*, and later shifted to *The Turkish Page* and *Unexpected Intrusion*. The alternative titles may have been a way to avoid confusion with a work by Frank Duveneck. Duveneck painted the

included Chase's cockatoo in her descriptions of Chase's Tenth Street Studio. The white cockatoo was one of the well-known "conspicuous exotic" residents of the studio, that also included a Russian hound and a pair of macaws.[294] The cockatoo of Tenth Street would continue to show up in Chase's paintings, notably *White Cockatoo* (Parrish Art Museum 1881).[295] For his first opportunity to capitalize on the promotional acumen of the Tile Club, he chose to make reference to the contents of his studio. He signed the drawing "Chase" in script so large it read more like a caption explaining that the lavish studio with the exotic bird was the work of William Merritt Chase.[296]

This first article on the Tile Club also presented a picture of the art atmosphere that greeted and influenced Chase upon his arrival in New York. After describing the formation of the group and its rules, writer and Tiler, W. M. Laffan humorously described the artists' attempts at painting tiles before the article turned to more serious issues faced by the group (though still delivered in Laffan's tongue-in-cheek manner). He wrote that after the Tilers finished working, they discussed art theory and the current climate for making, exhibiting, and selling art. Laffan stated that while the club began with the idea that they should "do something decorative," they had strayed far from this goal, which was half farce from the beginning.[297] Instead, he wrote, while no decorative theories were "worked out[,] discovered, or even sought," there were heated discussions about art and "its condition in this country."[298] Laffan described arguments between the Bone (the art critic and writer Earl Shinn who also went by the Tile pseudonym Edward Strahan) who had "a decorative chip on his shoulder" and O'Donoghue (American sculptor William R. O'Donovan) who "was perpetually trailing his garment of theory through the maze of every discussion that arose."[299] When either showed signs of giving in to the opinion of other, the Tilers reignited them by "giving the fire a friendly poke by throwing in a lively suggestion."[300] In addition to appreciating the group as an important promotional vehicle, Chase would have recognized

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same scene at the same time as Chase and called his work *The Turkish Page*. Chase painted his *The Turkish Page* at the same time as other works that were establishing his reputation in the press, including *The Broken Jug* and *The Apprentice*.

[294] Roof, 42.

[295] William Merritt Chase, *White Cockatoo*, c. 1881, oil on canvas, 32 1/4 x 46 1/8 in., Water Mill, New York, Parrish Art Museum, accessed August 2, 2020, http://parrishart.org/artist-stories/#/collection/10575067. The painting was also referred to as *Still Life with Cockatoo*.

[296] Laffan, "The Tile Club at Work," 404.

[297] Ibid., 408.

[298] Ibid.

[299] Ibid., 408-9; "Appendix: Members of the Tile Club and Their Known Sobriquets," 103.

[300] Laffan, "The Tile Club at Work," 408-409.

the club as a place to participate in and influence important discussions on art and meet the field's tastemakers.

While the Tilers often took this humorous and self-deprecating tone, their discussions ultimately revolved around determining ways to interest the public in buying work by American artists. Their livelihood depended on it. For this reason, they came up with a plan to attract more public attention without seeming as if they so desperately needed the coverage. For their second performance for *Scribner's*, the Tilers planned a trip from 10th Street out to Long Island, at that time still a remote locale made up of farming estates and fishing villages. On their staged adventure, the Tile Club would perform the role of a jovial, bohemian fraternity of artists, painting, sketching, eating and drinking, playing jokes on each other, and astounding the locals. The first article told the story of how the Tilers came up with the idea behind the trip that became the second article. Laffan reported that the Owl (artist, author, and engineer F. Hopkinson Smith) proposed they "take a tramp."[301] Jokingly, the Chestnut (painter and illustrator Edwin Austin Abbey) replied, "And kill him?"[302] After debating locations, Polyphemus (Laffan) suggested a Long Island fishing and shipping dock town that was quiet, sandy, and most importantly, picturesque. Thus, the article advertised not only the group, but also their next adventure and accompanying article as well. According to historian Linda Henefield Skalet, the Tilers functioned as "both Bohemians and businessmen."[303] They encouraged the public to think of them as romantic scamps indulging in a life of art and wine and free time, "while at the same time devising strategies to promote, exhibit, and sell their work."[304] By the time their first lengthy article appeared in a major journal, they had hit upon an effective marketing strategy: the performance of bohemia in the hopes of selling art.

The Tile Club at Play

The second article, "The Tile Club at Play," written by both Laffan and Strahan, covered their Long Island trip.[305] *Scribner's Monthly* allotted twice as much space to this article about the club's outing, likely because the first had piqued the public's interest in this

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[301] Ibid., 409.
[302] Ibid.
[303] Skalet, "Bohemians and Businessmen," 95.
[304] Ibid.
[305] W. Mackay Laffan and Edward Strahan [Earl Shinn], "The Tile Club at Play," *Scribner's Monthly* 17, no. 4 (February 1879): 457-478, accessed August 2, 2020, Hathi Trust Digital Library.

bohemian group of artists, musicians, and writers. Unfortunately for the visual artists, it may have missed the promotional mark. Most of the article was not about the work of the Tilers or even about their bohemian spirit and conversation. While the writers described the Tilers' dress, their sea voyage to the island, their meals, and some sketching, they spent over half of the article describing the nearby homes of prominent residents and providing historical context for the area. The writers seemed distracted and rambling, perhaps trying to draw attention this time to their own writing as opposed to giving all of the glory to the visual artists. In fact, they published a travel guide to the island soon after, reappropriating much of the material from this article.[306]

This second article was illustrated mainly with sketches and etchings created from the artists' oil paintings. No images of tiles or other decorative arts were included. In fact, the only mention of decoration or aesthetics was at the fad's expense. A story about the Owl (F. Hopkinson Smith) served as an example of a sharpening of tone when referring to the Aesthetic Movement. While the rest of the Tilers were waiting for dinner, the Owl disappeared. They had been looking for him when they heard a noise, and he came "tumbling headlong" out of a millinery house with "a bonnet on his head and two or three long crimson ribbons streamed behind him."[307] Laffan explained that he "had an attack of acute decorative mania."[308] While the public hadn't tired of the aesthetic craze, clearly, the Tile Club had lost some enthusiasm for it.

While this second Tile Club article failed to draw on the Aesthetic Movement to market the artists, it still provided insight into issues relating to the American art climate that would have concerned the group. The article's descriptions of sketching and painting, while scant, show that the Tilers were experimenting with painting *en plein air*, that is, painting out of doors, directly to canvas (as opposed to creating drawn studies and then returning to the studio to create a finished oil painting). Told again in Laffan's winking tone, the article referenced the influence of European impressionism and the pre-abstraction of James Abbot McNeill Whistler's *Nocturnes*. Laffan described the Gaul (British-born painter Walter Paris) as beginning "a study of severe minuteness, in the pre-Raphaelite way," however, "night surprised him and he finished with a few smeary daubs, declaring himself an impressionist."[309] Likewise, Sirius (American illustrator and painter Charles S. Reinhart)

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[306] Pisano, "Decorative Age or Decorative Craze," 33.
[307] Laffan and Strahan, "The Tile Club at Play," 463.
[308] Ibid.
[309] Ibid., 465.

attempted to paint the night sky, calling it *A Nocturne in Black and Blue*, while the Marine (American painter Arthur Quarterly known for his seascapes) called a painting of the sun *Hallucination in Purple and Prisms*.[310] These humorous descriptions show that the Tilers were engaged with all of the current art trends, even if they were critical of some of the more audacious ones. Overall though, the coverage of the trip by the writers was esoteric, not feeding the public interest in the bohemian or the decorative. The writers were busy gathering material for their travel guide.

When *Scribner's* published this provincial twenty-one page account of the Tilers' Long Island summer trip in February 1879, the Tilers must have realized that Laffan and Strahan had all but left them out of the article. The writers had delivered not a tale of the eccentric exploits of bohemian painters, but instead a piece showing off their own skills in describing the island destination. The second article served as a promotional vehicle for the writer-members, but it didn't help the painters. There is no record of how the Tiler artists responded to this article that was barely about them, but it is likely they noticed that the attention of their reporter members was slagging. The trip gave the visual artists the space in *Scribner's* they so desperately needed to reach the public, but they needed to create a more enticing spectacle to draw the interest of the writers. Fortunately for the Tilers, by the time they were planning their next trip, their coterie included the budding promotional genius of William Merritt Chase.

The Tile Club with Briarius

Chase joined the Tile Club in the winter of 1878-79. The group dubbed him *Briarius*, a Greek mythological figure with a hundred hands, perhaps a reference to his proficiency in many mediums or his large output of work.[311] The name was also fitting for someone who was working a hundred different promotional angles. Chase became a Tiler at a fortuitous time – after the outing to Long Island occurred, but before the second article ("Tile Club at Play") went to press. He had time to see what kind of impact the first two articles made and to conceptualize better promotional angles for their next publicity stunt. The original Tilers had created the perfect stage: bohemian outings soaked in aestheticism and presented by their own complicit press members. Now they needed an enticing performance for that stage. Chase would oblige. He was able to transform their excursion into a pseudo-event,

[310] Ibid.
[311] "Appendix: Members of the Tile Club and Their Known Sobriquets," 103.

that is, a synthetic happening created solely for the purpose of being reported.[312] This approach would garner the club the publicity they so needed.

The Tilers had declared that their next trip would be a boat journey down the Hudson River. More enticingly, it would be funded by *Scribner's Monthly* and thus practically guaranteed publication.[313] Chase knew that his studio was a reliable ticket to press attention, so his challenge was figuring out how to make references to his studio on Tenth Street while confined to a canal-boat. He did so by practically floating it down the Hudson.

In the spring of 1879, while Chase was finishing up his first school year of teaching at the League, the Tilers began organizing their aquatic adventure. They spent April and May finding an acceptable boat, rejecting several "that were too low in the ceiling, that had been carrying coal or fertilizers since the beginning of the century, that smelled of mules . . . or that otherwise wouldn't do."[314] When they finally chartered the *John C. Earle,* they got to work transforming the ship into a spectacle worthy of the aesthetic cadre. After applying a fresh coat of paint, the Tilers had delivered to the boat "all the freight of the studios."[315] They brought their "canvases, easels, draperies, costumes, paintboxes, portfolios, and all manner of effects."[316] In short, the Tilers brought what they needed to make art. Chase brought what he needed to recreate his Tenth Street Studio as a floating spectacle.

The Tenth Street Studio Afloat

"The Tile Club Afloat," the article that would capture the trip for *Scribner's*, described the "amazing transformation" of the canal-boat through and inventory of the migrated studio contents:

> The divans, that were easily translated into beds; the cushions, that were but pretexts for the diurnal concealment of pillows; the piano, the violins, the big dining-table, the arm-chairs and hammocks, the neat pile of fresh table-cloths and napkins, the excellent glassware on the sideboard, the decency of the cutlery, the neat student lamps and Chinese lanterns.[317]

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[312] Boorstin, 9. Boorstin's pseudo-event is discussed in the "Cultural Theory" section of Chapter One of this thesis.
[313] Roof, 78.
[314] W. Mackay Laffan and Edward Strahan [Earl Shinn], "The Tile Club Afloat," *Scribner's Monthly* 19, no. 5 (March 1880): 641-671, accessed August 2, 2020, Hathi Trust Digital Library.
[315] Ibid., 643.
[316] Ibid., 643-4.
[317] Ibid., 644.

Much of the bric-a-brac described in the *Scribner's* "Tile Club Afloat" article was the same detailed by Moran in the 1879 *Art Journal* article.[318] In this manner, we can be sure that much of the floating studio created by the Tile Club for their adventure was composed of objects from Chase's Tenth Street Studio. For example, the Tile Club vessel contained a small sanctuary designed like an old-world European chapel, strikingly similar in description to the one Chase created at Tenth Street. This passage from *Scribner's* is comparable to the earlier *Art Journal* article:

> The chapel, so called, was a dim corner of the salon, draped with the Nebuchadnezzar tapestry and adorned with a large Spanish crucifix, which was flanked on one side by a gilded St. Roch, in his pilgrim garb; on the other by a corresponding St. Joseph. Madonnas of Gothic acerbity were rather abundant in this corner; there were several pendant Italian lamps, and there was a swinging thurible, usually hung by the Madonna, which it was the duty of Deuteronomy (a hired servant) to keep burning with incense.[319]

To compare, the *Art Journal* article described a small section of the larger Tenth Street Studio that Chase had sectioned off and made into a chapel-like retreat again complete with "little wood carvings of saints, Virgins, and crucifixes."[320] Moran wrote for the *Art Journal*:

> This door brings one mysteriously to a small flight of stairs leading to a small gallery which contains a sofa and an organ. It is a perfect little bower, and from it the entire studio can be overlooked, and a most exquisite effect caught. A solemn, almost religious feeling comes over one when, with church draperies and church lamps and burning incense around him, he sits in the subdued light below and hears the organ sounding form above.[321]

In another passage, a Tiler whose name was reserved in the teasing manner of the author, showed off some of the contents of the "floating studio" to some visiting ladies during a shore visit.[322] Despite the faux anonymity, the Tiler was clearly Chase. The group of ladies walked through the boat, trying on "such Venetian or Eastern ornaments as caught their fancy," while their host explained:

> This trophy, ladies, exhibits halberts, yataghans, Algerian guns and pistols inlaid with turquoise, and the famous Greek arquebus with shoots round the corner. I picked it up, in fact, in the Corner palace in Venice . . . . This figure, ladies, is either a Hindoo idol or a Peruvian mummy, as is evident from its

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[318] Moran, "Studio-Life in New York," 343-45.
[319] Laffan and Strahan, "The Tile Club Afloat," 663.
[320] Moran, "Studio-Life in New York," 345.
[321] Ibid.
[322] Laffan and Strahan, "Tile Club Afloat," 650.

having lost its head.[323]

The Tiler was describing the bric-a-brac he picked up on a collecting spree in Venice – something we know Chase did with fervor. The description of the canal-boat bric-a-brac again harks back to the *Art Journal* article. For example, the earlier article described Venetian drapery and tapestry and other items picked up in the Italian markets. Moran continued to describe the exotic weaponry display at Tenth Street for the *Art Journal* as well:

> Here too hang arms, casques, and the various musical and offensive paraphernalia of warfare – guns both Eastern and Venetian, swords, pistols, bugles, East Indian drums and tom-toms, a straight knife . . . and many other curious articles.[324]

While all of the bric-a-brac described recalled the studio, the "Peruvian mummy" became nothing less than a Tenth Street hallmark. His biographer Roof later wrote a description of the fruits of his "collecting mania," noting: "At one time his favorite object was a small Peruvian mummy head."[325] By packing the canal-boat full of the identifiable treasures of his Tenth Street Studio, Chase ensured that the setting for the trip included those objects that reinforced his celebrity. He could be confident that by setting the scene with such identifiers, the impending *Scribner's* article would be embedded with references to his studio, and thus to himself as the genius behind the invocative bohemian aesthetic setting.

While these objects, loaded with allusions to Chase's studio, made their appearance in the article, so did Chase's artwork and likeness. The other artists included Chase's image in several of the drawings and sketches that they made to capture the journey for readers. For example, the drawing *Shadow Painting* showed Frederick Dielman at work sketching his cohorts, Chase and Napoleon Sarony, while they traced shadows made by willow leaves on one of the boat's awnings.[326] Laffan humorously claimed that "the willows themselves became decoratively ambitious" and the artists simply "took the hint."[327] In addition to drawings *of* Chase, *Scribner's* published at least one drawing *by* Chase. Many of the sketches and etchings featured in the article were unsigned or unattributed, perhaps because they were reproductions by *Scribner's* illustrators of the Tilers' paintings and drawings.

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[323] Ibid. Halberds, were fifteenth/sixteenth-century weapons. Yataghans were nineteenth-century Turkish weapons. An arquebus, or harquebus, was a fifteenth-century gun.
[324] Moran, "Studio-Life in New York," 345.
[325] Roof, 256.
[326] Laffan and Strahan, "Tile Club Afloat," 657.
[327] Ibid., 650.

However, one of the article's main images prominently featured Chase's large and identifiable signature in the upper left-hand corner. The drawing depicted one of the African American servants hired by the Tilers, identified in the article as Priam, likely a pseudonym supplied by the club in a manner that recalls the application of Greek and Roman names to enslaved peoples by their enslavers.[328] In other words, while the name seems regal, it was intended to be derogatory. The work, one of the more stylistically developed and sophisticated of the pieces featured, was painted with Chase's signature bold strokes. The Turkish garb was also his aesthetic touch. Chase often dressed himself in a Turkish fez and presented his longtime servant, Daniel, in such garb at public receptions. In fact, Chase often referenced Daniel, thus attired, in his paintings, yet another symbol pointing back to the Tenth Street Studio. Referring to Chase's incorporation of Daniel into his Tenth Street spectacle, Roof wrote:

> When his colored servant, Daniel, wearing a red fez, stood outside the entrance of the Tenth Street Studio, while the Russian hound, a conspicuous exotic in the [eighteen] seventies, gambolled about the street, and two brilliant-hued macaws and a white cockatoo perched upon the iron railing of the building, the resulting effect was certainly not similar to the rest of the quiet street.[329]

Priam, dressed in the recognizable attire of Daniel, became another symbol of the studio.

There is no question that this view of Daniel and Priam as art objects was dehumanizing and demeaning. Roof's 1917 biography of Chase used racist language to describe Daniel and stereotyped dialect when quoting him. Daniel was reportedly formerly enslaved, and Roof applied the loyal slave myth to her descriptions of his loyalty to Chase, claiming that "negro-like, he identified himself at once with his master's interests."[330] In reality, Daniel likely remained at Tenth Street because he determined it was to his advantage personally and professionally. Chase had a cleaning woman for the studio and an assistant for Daniel when needed, so his work would have been lighter than that of many servants. Daniel mainly bought or cooked food for gatherings, waited on guests, made sure Chase was dressed immaculately, and brought paintings and supplies back and forth from the studio and the Art Students League. Daniel had time to have an active social life and money to attend costume balls.

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[328] Ibid., 649; Jared Hardest, *Black Lives, Native Lands, White Worlds: A History of Slavery in New England* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2019), 32. Dr. Jason Kelly provided the note on the classical names assigned to enslaved peoples.
[329] Roof, 55.
[330] Ibid., 79, 88.

Reading between the lines of Roof's descriptions, we know a few things about Daniel's work in the studio and influence on Chase. Daniel often received visitors and updated them on Chase's work. He would comment on pieces that Chase chose to show or hide during the Saturday receptions. He took care of the animals and cleaned the painting supplies.[331] Most relevant here, Daniel would bring interesting people he met home as models. Roof reported that when Chase asked him why he chose an African sailor with a very dark complexion, Daniel answered: "Well, sah . . . I pass him in de street; I see he was a foreigner, an' I knew you like paintin' foreigners."[332] Chase, like his artist colleagues equated foreign with exotic, if the subject was picturesque. Chase often used props and costumes appropriated from other cultures to make his white models more exotic as well. There are many paintings of women in Japanese kimonos and men in Turkish fezzes, for example. However, Chase used Priam and Daniel as symbols of the studio in the manner he did the parrots and bric-a-brac. While his Black figures appear noble, even regal, his intention was to refer back to the studio, not to give them any personality or agency of their own. When Chase got another servant after Daniel was fired (for stealing, according to Roof) his replacement was given the red fez.[333] They were interchangeable studio objects. Chase included the painting of Priam in the *Scribner*'s article on the Tile Club to remind people of his "conspicuous exotic" studio and the artist behind it. His method worked.

Despite the obscuring mediation of Laffan's rambling and facetious writing style, Chase made his presence known to *Scribner's* readers through his art, his appearance in the art of his colleagues, and his imposition of the Tenth Street Studio into the article's setting. In fact, in several places in his article, Laffan referred to the vessel carrying the Tile Club as "the sailing studio" and "the floating studio."[334] Perhaps the most incredible thing about this article was that Chase was never mentioned, not by his name, and not even by his pseudonym. He was almost completely represented by the objects from his Tenth Street Studio. He would soon learn to capitalize on this form of representation more fully through his own artwork.

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[331] Ibid., 88-90.
[332] Ibid., 89.
[333] Ibid., 91-92.
[334] Laffan and Strahan, "Tile Club Afloat," 662, 668.

The Studio as Chase

By 1879, only a year after his arrival on the competitive and crowded New York art scene, Chase had mastered his publicity angle. He would create situations where his studio – which had been declared evidence of genius and covered in the press as the essence of bohemia – would stand in for himself as the artist. The studio would lend the artist its genius and its press coverage. Though he landed on this strategy quickly, it did not come easily. To review, he had received some moderate press coverage as a student, but it became clear to Chase that he was just one of many aspiring artists in a list of exhibition highlights. He needed a promotional angle and found it in his capture of the Tenth Street Studio. He laboriously decorated his studio in a manner that captured the attention of a public enamored with ideas about aesthetics and bohemia. When press coverage of his studio quickly eclipsed that of his artwork, he took careful note. To gain the coverage he needed to succeed as an artist, he capitalized on this acute interest in his studio by using the studio to create a spectacle that allowed the contents to represent him. To translate press coverage into sales of his work to patrons, one piece of the puzzle was still missing. He needed to create paintings that advertised both the studio and Chase as artist-for-hire. William Merritt Chase realized that to sell his work he should simply paint the spectacle of his manufactured bohemia.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE TENTH STREET STUDIO PAINTINGS AS ADVERTISEMENTS

> "William M. Chase seems determined the public shall not forget that he paints in an elaborately decorated studio, and he exhibits at the Society [of American Artists] *another* 'Studio Interior.'" – *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 1883.[335]

The wealthy and eccentric art patron and philanthropist Isabella Stewart Gardner paused at the bizarrely carved metal knocker marking the drab building's entrance. Ignoring the sign warning that the artist accepted visitors only on Saturdays, she pushed open the partially ajar door, setting off the musical mechanism and entered the Tenth Street Studio.[336] She had come to the edge of bohemia, and like the other ladies swathed in silks with exposed shoulders and their distinguished grey-headed gentleman companions, Gardner was eager to see the "talk of the town," the Spanish dancer Carmencita.[337]

Gardner stepped from the small outer studio "filled with treasures gathered together from half the curiosity shops in the old world" into the large studio filled with bric-a-brac and the paintings of William Merritt Chase.[338] Gardner accepted a bubbling Venetian champagne glass and a seat facing a large blank white canvas stretched across one corner of the famous studio.[339] Gathered around and standing behind the seated representatives of high society were artists and students of the studio.[340] The esteemed American painter John Singer Sargent was among them. Sargent had arranged the evening with the specific goal of selling his painting of Carmencita to Gardner who had expressed interest in another of his

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[335] "Fine Arts, The Sixth Annual Exhibition of the Society of American Artists," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle,* March 31, 1883, 2, accessed August 8, 2020, Newspapers.com. Emphasis added.
[336] Ishmael, "Through the New York Studios VI: William Merritt Chase," *Illustrated American* 5, No. 52 (February 14, 1891): 616-619, accessed August 8, 2020, Hathi Trust Digital Library; "An Unconventional Life," Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, accessed August 2, 2020, https://www.gardnermuseum.org/about/isabella-stewart-gardner. The description of the entrance to the Tenth Street Studio Building comes from the *Illustrated American*. For more on Gardner, see the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum's online biography.
[337] Montezuma, "My Note Book," *Art Amateur* 22, no. 6 (1890): 112-13, accessed August 2, 2020, JSTOR; Charles Dudley Warner, *The Golden House* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1894), 1-4, accessed August 9, 2020, Hathi Trust Digital Library. The quoted text is from *Art Amateur*. The description of the assembled crowd is drawn from Warner, who gives a fictionalized account of the evening, but one that was created soon after the event and that aligns closely with newspaper descriptions.
[338] Ishmael, 619.
[339] Warner, 4.
[340] Ibid., 4-5.

works, *El Jaleo*, also a painting of Spanish dance.[341] However, it was Chase's exotic studio as a space with a permeable boundary between propriety and licentiousness that brought Gardner from Boston to New York. The bohemia created by William Merritt Chase aroused desire in potential patrons – and that bohemia was now for sale through his artwork. By the mid-1880s, Gardner and other high society art collectors were buying original Chase works and commissioning portraits from the Tenth Street Studio's most famous occupant. His method of getting them there was as masterful as the paintings themselves.

The Studio for Sale

Wealthy patrons like Gardner wanted to own a piece of the myth Chase had so carefully created. By 1880, only two years after he established his legendary studio, he had crafted the perfect marketing plan. For several years, Chase prolifically painted the Tenth Street Studio itself. These paintings became effective advertisements for Chase, the master behind the peak aesthetic achievement of the era, as artist available for hire.

The rich oil paintings Chase made of his studio interior from approximately 1880 to 1885 were his most purely commercial endeavor.[342] In fact, they were advertisements for his talents and availability to buyers. While other artists at the Tenth Street Studio Building sometimes opened up their studios to visitors and held exhibitions that garnered media attention, Chase found a way to use the media to put his studio on more "permanent public display."[343] As discussed in the previous chapter, by 1880, extensive media coverage describing his studio in detail had linked this aesthetic achievement to the artist himself and increased his celebrity. He was famous as the creator of the Tenth Street Studio spectacle. The studio paintings that he began in 1880 reinforced this link, but more importantly, they advertised his availability as artist for hire. By painting the studio itself, the symbol of his aesthetic genius, and by loading the composition with messages to potential buyers, Chase pitched his talent to potential patrons. The allure of any Gilded Age artist was his otherworldliness, and so Chase had to tread cautiously into the world of commercialism, lest it harm his genius bohème reputation.[344] To mask his intent, Chase hid his commercial

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[341] John Singer Sargent to William Merritt Chase, no date, in Roof, 156; Sharyn R. Udall, *Dance and American Art: A Long Embrace* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 116-17.
[342] Blaugrund, 117.
[343] Ibid., 115.
[344] Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist*, 49. Burns dissected the line carefully tread by Gilded Age artists in maintaining their credibility while working to make a living with their art. She

message in the composition of the paintings themselves. Much like a department store window presented goods in groups, each object lending the other some of its value and enticement, Chase linked the celebrated bric-a-brac with his paintings, patrons, and himself in the studio interior compositions.[345]

As discussed, newspaper and journal articles, ostensibly about Chase but in reality focused on describing the studio, were often accompanied by an engraving of the studio and its contents drawn by an illustrator hired by the editor. These articles brought more celebrity to the studio along with public recognition of Chase's name. After he began painting the studio as his subject in 1880, such articles often included images or descriptions of these studio paintings. Instead of only garnering further celebrity only for the studio, such articles also advertised Chase's painting skills. The studio interiors conveyed to patrons that they could own a little piece of the coveted studio or even hire the modern master who created it for a commission. As explained in the previous chapter, Chase designed the studio to achieve public renown, but his work was overshadowed by public interest in the space. By painting the object of their admiration, the studio itself, he redirected attention to his painting. Furthermore, in each painting, he included a message that pointed back to himself as artist.[346] In short, he included an advertisement for himself. Over approximately five years, he created a body of similar paintings featuring the studio as subject, though the messages he conveyed in these works varied. The works discussed in the following sections are not the only Chase paintings that depict aspects of his studio. He painted many interiors throughout his career. Instead, the following sections are the works that best show the studio as subject in the years he most dramatically increased his celebrity. The press surrounding some of these works, as well as the messages embedded in the works themselves, show that through these studio paintings Chase finally secured his renown as one of the Gilded Age's most talented and sought after artists.

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explained that "they had to market what they produced" but "if they engaged too obviously in selling, though, they made themselves vulnerable to scathing and even apocalyptic denouncements."

[345] Ibid., 53. Burns wrote, "The artist's studio and department store displays were both productions of the showman's art."

[346] For discussion of authors including messages in his work pointing back to himself, see discussion in Chapter One: Historiography.

Fig. 2 William Merritt Chase, *Tenth Street Studio*, 1880, oil on canvas, 36 1/4 x 48 1/4 in. (92.1 x 122.6 cm) Object number 48:1933, Bequest of Albert Blair, Saint Louis, MO, Saint Louis Art Museum, accessed August 2, 2020, https://www.slam.org/collection/objects/33760/.

The Painted Advertisements

Chase made the first of these studio interior paintings, *The Tenth Street Studio* (Saint Louis Art Museum), in 1880.[347] In this work, he deftly represented the famous studio bric-a-brac and décor in sumptuous tones: a red oriental rug, Turkish brass lamps, Greek-inspired classical figurines, and various taxidermied animals. Through these details, Chase displayed his technical skills as an artist, while serving the public a feast of bohemian aestheticism. In this first painting of the studio interior, Chase brought to life the myriad media descriptions of Tenth Street that had enraptured the public over the previous two years. By doing so, he reinforced his identity as a genius aesthete. Beyond that, Chase included compositional details advertising himself as a working artist. For example, on the mantle of a large piece of antique furniture, he painted a vase full of the long-handled oil brushes favored by a majority of the era's artists. He also rendered a large oil painting leaning up against this bureau. Chase depicted this painting within the painting as finished and framed, but not hanging on the wall, because he was portraying the work as sold and ready to be shipped to its buyer. Also prominent in the composition, scattered among the bric-a-brac, furniture, and rugs, he depicted an array of art prints. Artists often used such prints as references to create larger oil paintings and to pitch proposals for commissions to wealthy patrons. With these details – the brushes, the ready-to-ship painting, and the prints representing potential commissions – Chase advertised his commercial availability to the public. These details hinting at his availability for hire, however, were not the focus of the composition.[348]

Instead, Chase centered the composition of *The Tenth Street Studio* on the exchange between an artist and a well-dressed female patron in her element among the decadent studio surroundings. The dark-haired woman, wearing a pale gown of sumptuously painted

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[347] William Merritt Chase, *Tenth Street Studio*, 1880, oil on canvas, 36 1/4 x 48 1/4 in. (92.1 x 122.6 cm) Object number 48:1933, Bequest of Albert Blair, Missouri, Saint Louis Art Museum, accessed August 2, 2020, https://www.slam.org/collection/objects/33760/; Blaugrund, 117. This painting was also referred to in newspapers as *Interior of the Artist's Studio* and sometimes as *Interior of a Studio.* Several of Chase's studio works share identical or similar titles. Thus, the owning institution will be provided in parentheses in the text when necessary to distinguish the works.

[348] Bryant, 70-73. In his 1991 biography of Chase, historian Keith Bryant recognized the role of these paintings as advertisements, but forwarded a different argument for what they are advertising than does this thesis. Bryant wrote, "These works advertised Chase the artist, a man of taste and talent who surrounded himself with beautiful objects." I agree with Bryant that Chase was presenting himself as more successful than he was with his opulent surroundings, but builds on this observation. While the background objects indeed conveyed to the reader his success, the actions of the figures portrayed in the painting and their clear roles as buyer and seller advertised Chase as artist for hire.

ruffles, commanded the viewer's eye to the center of the work. Chase depicted the figure reclining comfortably in a blue chair, holding an art print in one hand. More prints were scattered around her feet. The Gilded Age viewer would have known from her fashionable attire that she was a woman of high society with the means to make a purchase. She was not one of the lookie-loos who came for Saturday open houses only to gaze at the famous studio contents described in so many articles. Instead, by depicting her as a woman of means and as interested in the art prints, Chase told the painting's viewers that she had come to the Tenth Street Studio to examine his artwork and decide on a purchase or commission.[349]

The other figure Chase included in this painting was the artist for hire whose role he made evident to the viewer through several compositional elements. The artist figure leaned forward, listening intently to his patron and holding his palette at the ready. He appeared to have scored his commission and was preparing to start sketching ideas. If viewers somehow missed all of these clues, media descriptions would have spelled it out for them.[350] When Chase exhibited the work at the Society of American Artists exhibition in March 1881, the *New York Times* described it thoroughly:

> The one studio interior, with a young lady extended after an easy going fashion in a blue, deep fauteuil [arm chair], and a portrait of the painter opposite on a divan; rugs, paintings, bric-a-brac, and a large rough-haired grey hound assimilate the picture.[351]

Despite the artist figure's position in a shadowed corner of the work, Chase ensured that viewers would be able to identify him. He did this by painting the version of himself that was recognizable from the extensive media descriptions encountered by the public. In fact, the following 1882 description of an in-person encounter with Chase by a Midwestern

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[349] Pisano, *A Leading Spirit in American* Art, 44-45; Bryant, 70; "William Merritt Chase," Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed August 2, 2020, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/chas/hd_chas.htm. In their discussions of this painting, Chase historians Bryant and Pisano note only that the visitor was a wealthy woman who was welcome in the studio, not as a patron actively seeking a purchase or commission. However, by this point, society woman were active patrons. While most of their portraits would have been paid for by their wealthy husbands, art-interested society women would have been actively involved in choosing their artist. According to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, later in his career, "Portraits of fashionable women became his stock-in-trade and he commanded $2,000 for a full-length portrait during the 1890s." Thus, in the 1880s, with this goal, Chase would have been taking such female patrons seriously, not unlike the seriousness with which he took female students. The model for this patron was likely Virginia Gerson, who would become Chase's sister-in-law.

[350] Media response to the studio paintings as a body is examined later in this chapter.

[351] "The American Artists," *New York Times*, March 27, 1881, 2, accessed August 8, 2020, New York Times Article Archive.

newspaper correspondent could be substituted as a description for the Chase figure depicted in the painting:

> Mr. Chase's private sanctum . . . with its massive, carved ebony furniture . . . its large wardrobe inlaid with Venetian panels of beveled glass, its cabinets, its easy chairs, its great carved chest . . . . It is certainly a very cosy [sic] den. In the midst of these surroundings Mr. Chase himself moves about looking very much 'in character' with them. He is a slenderly-built man, of medium height, dark, with a pale, intelligent face, the lower portion of which is hidden by a carefully waxed black moustache, and beard á la Vandyek.[352]

The newspaper also reported that he wore "a fob, light-topped pointed-toed gaiters and a polo cap."[353] The artist figure in the Tenth Street Studio was dressed exactly as this newspaper described Chase. The painting delivered its message effectively: the artist who created the famous studio was available for just such a commission consultation as the one depicted in paint.

Art writers noticed and commented on another telling feature of the work. While the figures and the studio space carried equal weight in the composition, the figures maintained a certain level of abstraction preventing them from being read as formal portraits. Instead, Chase depicted the *roles* of the figures as patron and artist. While he made recognizable through clothing and surroundings the identity of the artist figure as himself, he did not flesh out the details of the faces any more than the surrounding bric-a-brac. A *New York Times* writer recognized that the shadowed figure was indeed Chase, but also noted that the faces in the scene were not "elaborated."[354] Chase did not need to "elaborate" the features of the female figure because he wanted the viewer to identify her as a patron, not as a specific person. Perhaps he even intended this ambiguity to allow the viewer to more easily imagine herself in that role.

For this first of the studio paintings, Chase chose not capture the identity of a specific patron or her specific choice of painting. He chose instead to paint the figures in their roles as buyer and seller of artwork. The 1880 painting *The Tenth Street Studio* (Saint Louis Art Museum) was not portraiture. Nor was it simply further promotion for the studio itself, which was already more famous than Chase could have dreamed. Instead, the painting was an advertisement for Chase as artist for hire. Portrait commissions were the intended

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[352] "Our New York Letter," *Weekly Wisconsin* (Milwaukee, WI), March 15, 1882, 8, accessed August 8, 2020, Newspapers.com.
[353] Ibid.
[354] "The American Artists," *New York Times*, March 27, 1881, 2, accessed August 8, 2020, New York Times Article Archive.

outcome of these advertisements. As Chase's advertising took effect, his studio paintings would evolve in message and artistic style. That is, they inched closer toward portraiture with the studio receding into the background. Over the next few years, he continued to create painted advertisements featuring depictions of art-buying patrons and himself as artist for hire.[355] The variations on this theme tell us much about Chase's motivations and the Gilded Age art climate.[356] Perhaps no painting betrays his commercial intentions more plainly than his next work.

[355] Pisano, *A Leading Spirit in American Art*, 44-45. Like Bryant, Pisano argued that the paintings were advertisements for Chase's success as an "artist-gentleman, as well as a collector with refined taste." However, Pisano went a step further in anticipating this thesis's argument that they were advertisements for Chase as artist for hire. Pisano writes, "In part, these paintings also advertised Chase's services as an artist on a grand scale and in a dignified manner." While Pisano introduced the concept, he interpreted *The Tenth Street Studio*'s message only as Chase's desire to show that the studio was a "proper setting" for a society woman to visit and that such visits were "encouraged."

[356] For a discussion of how scholars of Chase's work interpreted his advertising message see the following , "The Second Tenth Street Studio, Carnegie Museum of Art." For information on how Chase's advertising message was received by the contemporary press, see the section "Inner Studio, Tenth Street, Henry E. Huntington Library," also in this chapter.

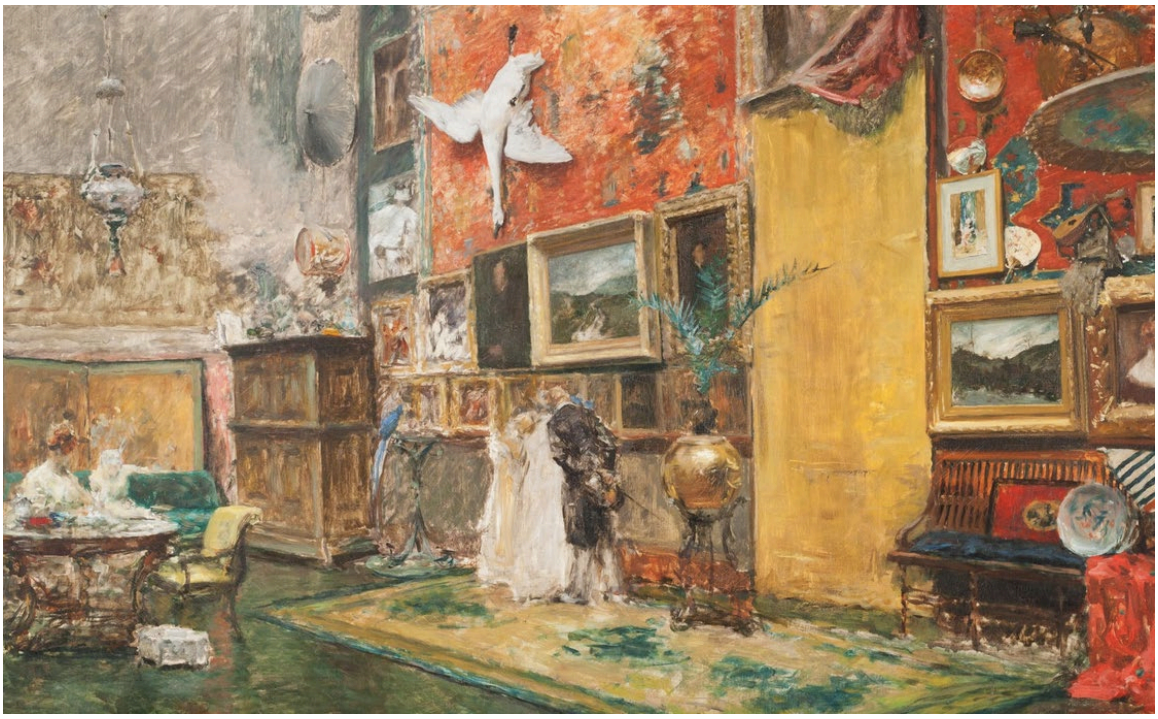

Fig. 3 William Merritt Chase, *Tenth Street Studio*, ca. 1880-1881, 1910, oil on canvas, 46 7/8 × 66 in (119.06 × 167.64 cm) Pittsburgh, PA, Carnegie Museum of Art, accessed August 2, 2020, https://collection.cmoa.org/objects/9ac49700-1a87-4972-8b66-84847ad95d85.

The Second *Tenth Street Studio,* Carnegie Museum of Art

Between 1880 and 1881, Chase began another studio painting that pushed the commercial message of his first work further, perhaps too far for Gilded Age sensibilities.[357] The composition of this second *Tenth Street Studio* (Carnegie Museum of Art) again included the sumptuous reds and yellows of the studio's wallpaper, Turkish rugs, Japanese silks, and tapestries.[358] Again, Chase depicted the recognizable incense lamps, bronze bowls, musical instruments, and taxidermy adorning the studio walls and packed into the corners. And again, Chase painted a society woman in a fine white dress lounging on a blue piece of furniture, engaged in the examination of art prints. In this work, her features are even less "elaborated" than the first work.[359] The artist barely did more than sketch her in oil. He painted a second figure next to her on the blue divan, one that the viewer could be forgiven for missing upon first glance. Chase barely sketched the top of this figure's bonneted head bent over what again looks like a book of the artist's prints.[360] Chase chose not to fully render these figures for two reasons. First, he wanted these semi-abstract figures to be read as generic patrons, not specific people. Second, he did not intend for these figures to be the main focus of painting. Instead, he designed the composition to draw the viewer into the center of the work where he depicted a gentleman in a black jacket, white pants, and spats, with his back to the viewer, his hands behind him, holding a palette and a brush. From media depictions of Chase, a Gilded Age viewer would have instantly recognized this figure. The artist figure's head was cocked to one side as he and two well-dressed women examined the art, that is, Chase's art, on the walls. The interaction depicted in this work is more explicitly commercial than that of his first studio interior.[361] In the first work, the artist figure consulted with a patron on a commission yet to be executed. In this work, the artist was pictured offering to sell his clients a work right off the showroom floor. In fact, a refined Gilded Age audience may have seen this unabashed commercial message as

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[357] Blaugrund, 118. While Chase completed the painting between 1880 and 1881, he added spots of bright color to the painting's surface around 1910.
[358] William Merritt Chase, *Tenth Street Studio*, c. 1880-1881, 1910, oil on canvas, 46 7/8 × 66 in (119.06 × 167.64 cm) Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Carnegie Museum of Art, accessed August 2, 2020, https://collection.cmoa.org/objects/9ac49700-1a87-4972-8b66-84847ad95d85.
[359] "The American Artists," *New York Times*, March 27, 1881, 2, accessed August 8, 2020, New York Times Article Archive.
[360] Blaugrund, 117-118; Pisano, *Leading Spirit in American Art*, 44-45. Blaugrund and Pisano give physical descriptions of the painting.
[361] Ibid.

uncouth.[362] In this second studio advertisement, he failed to sublimate his marketing message to the art.

Chase Scholars on the Studio Paintings

A few museum curators and art historians have noted the commercial intent of the two aforementioned paintings sharing the name *Tenth Street Studio*. Two of these scholars' ideas are worth examining in more depth. Their ideas, combined with an analysis of a Chase sketch created at the same time, further the argument for treating the works as advertisements and show where Chase took his commercial aims too far for public taste. Ronald Pisano, a longtime Chase collector, cataloguer, and biographer, remarked on Chase's advertising aims in relation to his studio paintings. Pisano noted briefly Chase's desire to present himself as "an artist-gentleman collector with refined taste" and to advertise his "services as an artist on a grand scale and in a dignified manner."[363] In reference to the first work, *The Tenth Street Studio* (Saint Louis Art Museum), Pisano considered Chase's main goal to be the depiction of the "elegant lady" as welcome in the studio as "the proper setting for such visits."[364] Here Pisano was referring to another message we've seen Chase deliver in paintings, interviews, and even his dress. That is, Chase depicted himself as a gentleman and the studio as a stylish, upper-class parlor, a socially acceptable atmosphere in which to receive society visitors. Pisano stopped short of identifying the figures in this first painting as patron and artist, buyer and seller. In describing the second work, *The Tenth Street Studio* (Carnegie Museum of Art), Pisano pointed out that Chase "goes a step a further by portraying several visitors actually inspecting the paintings on the walls."[365] He did not, however, specifically spell out *what* exactly Chase took "a step further," that is, the commercial implications of "actually inspecting" the art. Pisano seemed to have intuited that this work was more commercial, without spelling it out precisely. Pisano concluded that in the first work, Chase was simply depicting the studio as an appropriate setting for patrons, while in the second painting Chase was presenting his work to them. Other scholars made the next logical step. That is, Chase was presenting his work to them for sale.

In his comparison of the two works of the same name, historian Keith Bryant made similar observations to Pisano. In his biography of Chase, Bryant stated that through his

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[362] Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist*, 49.
[363] Pisano, *Leading Spirit in American Art*, 44-45.
[364] Ibid.
[365] Ibid.

studio paintings Chase advertised himself as an artist and "a man of taste and talent who surrounded himself with beautiful objects."[366] Unsurprisingly, Bryant interpreted the first painting *The Tenth Street Studio* (Saint Louis Art Museum) in the same way as did Pisano. Bryant described the work and explained that "the elegant lady is clearly welcomed to the studio."[367] And like Pisano, Bryant saw a shift toward the more explicitly commercial with the second painting, *Tenth Street Studio* (Carnegie Art Museum). Bryant wrote, "Chase blatantly portrayed two guests examining paintings on the studio wall, a more obvious piece of advertising."[368] Thus, Bryant clearly identified the work as an advertisement. It is unclear exactly what Bryant thought Chase was advertising outside of "the grandeur of the studio and its spaciousness."[369] Notably, Bryant missed a key detail in Chase's second work that may account for why he did not expound. The author identified the figures as "guests examining paintings," missing the fact that one of the figures was Chase.[370] Bryant must have overlooked the palette and brush the artist figure held behind his back. Consequently, Bryant read the work as elegant society visitors passively gazing at artwork, as opposed to the artist showing off his wares. With this detail corrected through identification of the artist figure, the scene becomes a painting of Chase in his salesroom conferring with buyers. Even missing this key detail, Bryant deduced Chase's commercial intention. Leading Chase scholars Pisano and Bryant both recognized the studio paintings' role as advertisements without expounding on the point. Introducing a sketch that Chase made for the second painting into this discussion removes all ambiguity from the artist's intent.

The Sketch

In 1881, the *American Art Review* published a preliminary sketch Chase made for the second studio painting, *Tenth Street Studio* (Carnegie Art Museum).[371] The differences between the sketch and final work provide insight into his commercial intentions. In the sketch, well-dressed visitors examine paintings on the studio wall, while at the edge of the

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[366] Bryant, 70.
[367] Ibid.
[368] Ibid., 72-73. Bryant notes two figures instead of three, perhaps reading the two women in white as one figure.
[369] Ibid., 73.
[370] Ibid.
[371] "View in the Studio of Wm. M. Chase," 1881, sketch, in M. G. Van Rensselaer. "William Merritt Chase: Second and Concluding Article," *American Art Review* 2 (Boston: Dana Estes and Charles E. Lauriat, 1881) 138, accessed August 8, 2020, Google Books.

composition, the artist works at an easel in a shadowed corner. In the final painting, Chase moved the artist figure from the shadows, brought him into the center of the composition, and engaged him with the visitors as salesman.[372] If one were to remain in doubt of Chase's intent as expressed through the changes he made from sketch to final work, his actions in regard to the work's sale and exhibition made his message undeniably clear. The works on the walls were for sale.

Chase treated the two works sharing the name *Tenth Street Studio* in markedly different ways, providing insight into his advertising intent. Chase exhibited the first painting, the one with the subtler commercial message, often. At exhibitions given by the Society of American Artists alone, he showed it three times.[373] And Chase sold this first painting "almost immediately after it was finished" to renowned art collector Samuel M. Dodd of Saint Louis who continued to have it exhibited as well.[374] In contrast, Chase never exhibited or sold the second work, the one with the more obvious commercial message. This painting stayed with Chase until his death when it was purchased at auction by the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh.[375] Chase went out of his way to craft this message, one that he so desperately needed to be received by potential patrons for his very livelihood. So, why did he not exhibit the work? It is possible that Chase chose not to share the more blatant advertisement because Gilded Age American artists needed to tread carefully into commercialism because of the great risk of public backlash to obvious ambition.

Treading the Line

Gilded Age American artists, living in an era that celebrated them as aesthetes who lived in a bohemian world beyond the concerns of the everyday, faced a conundrum. On one hand, art writers and connoisseurs of the period saw commercialism as a corrupting force in art. On the other hand, the patrons actually buying art were encouraged by opulent surroundings to make a purchase. Additionally, artists and art dealers found that they sold more paintings if they created an alluring ambience by presenting the works in gilded frames surrounded by bric-a-brac.[376] These displays got more and more ostentatious, until they were lampooned and satirized in art journals and newspapers. The artists themselves

[372] Blaugrund, 115-118.
[373] Ibid., 117
[374] Ibid.
[375] Ibid., 118.
[376] Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist,* 46-49.

often complained that their works had to be packaged in this manner. For example, Winslow Homer referred to the fashionable shadow box frames used by dealers to create desire in patrons as "robbery boxes" and refused to allow them to frame his work.[377] The point remained that lavish display, whether in robbery boxes or department store-like displays, resulted in sales. Meanwhile, art writers and critics "linked modernity and commercialism with second rate art production" and even debated whether commercialism in the art world "would lead inexorably from mere mediocrity to spiritual bankruptcy."[378] The artists were caught between seemingly incompatible demands: create an atmosphere of desire to attract buyers, but avoid the taint of commercialism. In essence, the era lauded lavish display in art settings while disparaging commercialism in its artists. Art historian Sarah Burns explained: "Artists had to weigh their options carefully in seeking to perfect their own precarious balancing acts – or risk being toppled from the higher planes of art."[379] The appearance of remaining untainted by commercialism was of primary importance to an artist's success. Burns concluded that "the reality of commercialism" was undeniable and therefore "the management of appearances" was the only outlet for artists.[380] William Merritt Chase and his colleagues needed to dazzle patrons with ostentatious display to attract sales, while not appearing to pursue such sales at all. Chase walked a fine line.

For Chase, the perfect mitigating element between commercialism and pure artistic expression was the lavishly decorated, yet aesthetically divine studio. The exotic bric-a-brac, tools of the artistic trades, floor to ceiling decorations, and artworks expressed a bohemian and creative persona, while creating desire in patrons. The studio was gallery and salesroom, aesthetic mecca and effective marketing tool, pure artistic expression and commercial department store. Both the "show studio" and department store juxtaposed aesthetic objects to increase desire in order to sell something of little to no practical use.[381] And as previously examined, American artists had to use every tool available to compete with more sought after European artists. Of course, in the artist's studio, unlike the department store, most of the art objects themselves were not for sale, but were included instead to create an art atmosphere. That is, bric-a-brac increased patrons' desire to make a

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[377] Ibid. 48-49. Instead, Homer insisted on calculating "the value of his work by the force of its naked authenticity." He was praised for such public statements, but, privately, he carefully tracked his sales.
[378] Ibid., 46.
[379] Ibid., 49.
[380] Ibid.
[381] Ibid., 53.

purchase, while at the same time hiding the intent of the showroom. Since Chase had successfully created the most lavish studio in all of New York, he was, in turn, successful in transcending this binary art atmosphere. He carefully walked the line between untoward commercialism and the subtler advertising message of the studio atmosphere. Once he learned to operate in this grey area, he recognized the second studio painting as too blatant an advertisement and chose not to sell or exhibit it. In his subsequent studio paintings, Chase found a masterful balance.

Fig. 4 William Merritt Chase, *Studio Interior*, ca. 1882, oil on canvas, 28 1/16 x 40 1/8 in. (71.2 x 101.9 cm) Accession Number 13.50, Gift of Mrs. Carll H. de Silver in Memory of her Husband, Brooklyn, NY, Brooklyn Museum, accessed August 2, 2020, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/28.

***Studio Interior,* Brooklyn Museum of Art**

In the next work under discussion, *Studio Interior* (Brooklyn Museum of Art), Chase chose to paint a different section of the same wall he depicted in the *Tenth Street Studio* (Carnegie Museum).[382] The gold tapestry that hung on the right side of the second work, he placed on the left of the composition of *Studio Interior*. In other words, if the two scenes were juxtaposed, overlapping at the tapestry, a viewer would have a panoramic picture of the entire intricately decorated wall.[383] In this third studio painting, Chase depicted a now familiar scene: paintings in gilded frames, rich tapestries, brass antiques, and other bric-a-brac. Again, despite the disparate conglomeration of objects, the subject of the painting was the studio as a whole in all of its aesthetic harmony.[384] *Studio Interior,* then, serves as a third example of how Chase created the department store effect that aroused desire in the viewer for ownership of a piece of the studio – an original Chase artwork. As he did in the first two paintings, within the composition of *Studio Interior,* Chase again depicted a woman in fine clothes examining a book of prints, perhaps created by the artist himself. Unlike the first two works, in this third painting Chase depicted the female figure "in a costume of an earlier period," wearing a dated bonnet and dress.[385] As previously discussed, Chase made careful, not random choices in these studio paintings in order to deliver his commercial message. In contrasting this dated garb with the setting of the most fashionable studio in New York City, Chase was telling the viewer that his model was a wealthy patron having her portrait painted. He was delivering the message that he was an artist in demand by the elite. Some wealthy patrons chose to wear historic costumes in their portraits to lend the credence of earlier European painting traditions to its modern American counterpart as a way of getting around their hesitation to use American artists as their portraitists. *Studio Interior*, was meant to represent a behind-the-scenes look at a portrait sitting. The Gilded Age viewer would have seen a wealthy patron, perhaps on a break from sitting for her portrait, candidly caught admiring his book of prints. The beauty of the scene, combined with the serene,

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[382] William Merritt Chase, *Studio Interior*, ca. 1882, oil on canvas, 28 1/16 x 40 1/8 in. (71.2 x 101.9 cm) Accession Number 13.50, Gift of Mrs. Carll H. de Silver in Memory of Her Husband, New York, Brooklyn Museum, accessed August 2, 2020, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/28. Several secondary sources (including Stein and Cikovsky) used the title *In the Studio* for this work.
[383] Blaugrund, 118.
[384] Ibid., 118-9. Blaugrund wrote of the painting, "The whole took precedence over the parts; no single object, including the model, was given total prominence at the expense of overall pictorial harmony."
[385] Ibid., 119.

seemingly sincere moment, offset the commercialism of the underlying message: high society patrons regularly, even casually, came to the studio to have their portraits painted by William Merritt Chase.

In addition to advertising the studio as *the* destination for society portraiture in general, Chase may have been trying to link his name to a specific well-known socialite. The fact that he already served an A-list clientele could have convinced potential patrons that he was in fashion, thus increasing their desire to choose him as portraitist. In a similar way that surrounding art with bric-a-brac increased commercial desire, a well-known, stylish model could have increased the value of his social stock. The woman depicted in *Studio Interior* may have been Harriet Hubbard Ayer, a socialite turned entrepreneur.[386] Chase had recently painted her portrait*, Harriet Hubbard Ayer (*Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco).[387] The costume worn by the main subject of *Studio Interior* is strikingly similar to that Ayer wore in her portrait. Perhaps he painted this work at the same time as the portrait, capturing her in the studio during a sitting, and turning it into an advertisement he hoped might work on her peers. The model could also have been Marietta Benedict Cotton, an artist, a veritable Gilded Age "it girl," and, at this point, a student of William Merritt Chase.[388] Several years later, in 1888, Chase painted an acclaimed portrait of her, *Lady in Black* (Metropolitan Museum of Art). [389] The coloring and facial features of the female subjects of both works are quite similar. Cotton was connected to high society, even royalty, which would have been attractive to Chase. Linking her image to that of the studio would have lent prestige to Chase. No matter which woman served as the model for *Studio Interior*,

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[386] Ibid. Blaugrund introduced the idea that the female figure in the painting was Ayer. However, she also identified Ayer as the model in a painting titled *In The Studio* (1884, Reynolda House Museum), and the figures look quite different. Based comparison of physical features alone, it seems more likely that the model for *Inner Studio* was Cotton, not Ayer or the model from *In The Studio*. But the costuming of Ayer still makes her an intriguing possibility.

[387] Ibid.; M. G. Van Rensselaer, "William Merritt Chase," in Walter Montgomery, ed*., American Art and American Art Collections*, Vol. 1, (Boston: E. W. Walker & Co, 1889), 263, accessed August 8, 2020, Internet Archive; William Merritt Chase, *Harriet Hubbard Ayer*, 1880, oil on canvas, 27 x 22 1/8 in. (68.6 x 56.2 cm) California, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, accessed August 2, 2020, https://art.famsf.org/william-merritt-chase/harriet-hubbard-ayer-19421. The portrait of Ayer has also been referred to in primary sources as *Lady in a Directoire Dress*.

[388] William Merritt Chase, *Lady in Black*, 1888, oil on canvas, 74 1/4 x 36 5/16 in. (188.6 x 92.2 cm) New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed August 2, 2020, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/91.11/. The Met's label for Chase's *Lady in Black* describes Marietta Benedict Cotton.

[389] Ibid.

the message was the same. Any respectable society woman could feel confident that Chase was one of them, a bohemian artist, yes, but also a cosmopolitan and respectable gentleman. He was the man to hire for a society portrait, as advertised by *Studio Interior*. In fact, the model is impossible to identify absolutely because Chase again intentionally slightly obscured her defining facial features. Like the first two works, *In the Studio* was not a portrait of a specific person. It was an advertisement to patrons who could imagine themselves as the figures admiring artwork and conferring with the artist in the famous Tenth Street Studio.

Fig. 5 William Merritt Chase, *Inner Studio, Tenth Street*, 1882, oil on canvas, 32 ⅜ x 44 ¼ in. (82.2 x 112.4 cm.) San Marino, CA, The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, accessed August 2, 2020, emuseum.huntington.org/objects/5292/the-inner-studio-tenth-street. Image courtesy of the Huntington Art Museum, San Marino, California.

***Inner Studio, Tenth Street,* Henry E. Huntington Library**

Also in 1882, Chase painted *Inner Studio, Tenth Street* (Huntington Library), another example of a studio interior serving as an effective advertisement.[390] At first glance, this work seems more discreet in its commercialism than the aforementioned works for three main reasons. First, it is smaller in size, making it less assuming when displayed on exhibition or gallery walls. Second, it depicts the small, private side studio room where the artist painted, as opposed to the larger, more public, main studio room, which served as gallery, reception hall, and salesroom.[391] Third, and most notably, *Inner Studio* portrayed the artist at work making art. Through these methods, Chase seemingly presented a more purely artistic, as opposed to commercial, theme in this work. He still depicted himself in the spats and suit coat that matched the physical descriptions of the artist in the press and thus ensured he was identifiable to viewers. The *Chicago Tribune* described the focus of the paintings as "a figure, said to be the artist's own . . . seated at an easel." [392] Like the two paintings titled *Tenth Street Studio*, *Inner Studio* included an artist figure recognizable as Chase. Unlike those paintings, Chase did not depict the artist figure as conferring with patrons in *Inner Studio*. Instead, the artist was simply at work on his trade.[393]

While it delivered a more muted commercial message, *Inner Studio* had similarities to the earlier, more blatantly commercial works. Chase again depicted the gilded interior of the famous atelier "replete with all the accessories, bric-a-brac, and orderly confusion of a well-appointed studio."[394] Also reminiscent of the earlier studio interiors, the composition contained depictions of art prints scattered about the room. Again, this mess of prints told the viewer that the artist had only recently shown the prints to a patron or was referencing them for a commission. The message was that his work was in demand and he was busy filling orders.

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[390] William Merritt Chase, *Inner Studio, Tenth Street*, 1882, oil on canvas, 32 3/8 x 44 1/4 in. (82.2 x 112.4 cm.) San Marino, California, Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, accessed August 2, 2020, emuseum.huntington.org/objects/5292/the-inner-studio-tenth-street.
[391] Bryant, 73.
[392] "Art in Chicago," *Chicago Tribune*, October 8, 1882, 22, accessed August 8, 2020, Newspapers.com.
[393] Blaugrund, 118.
[394] "Art in Chicago," 22.

The unconventional composition that Chase created for *Inner Studio* also served as a significant conveyer of his commercial intent.[395] Chase painted the artist figure with his back to the viewer, focused on the painting in progress. The figure was shown holding his palette in his left hand and leaning into the painting with his right shoulder, as his other hand, though unseen, dabbed at the canvas. But this work was not a simple depiction of the artist in the act of painting. Chase added a unique detail to the work: the painting within the painting that the artist figure was working on, was already set in a gilded frame. On top of the frame sat an orange decorative drapery, ready to be pulled over the canvas. Chase always had an alternate goal, usually one aimed at self-promotion, that he communicated through compositional elements. The framed canvas and drape implied that at any moment, the patron would arrive to check on the artist's progress, that is, on his or her purchase. Upon hearing the musical mechanism announcing the arrival of a visitor, Chase would set his palette aside, drop the curtain over the work, and greet his patron. The *Inner Studio* depicted an artist, not hard at work on a raw canvas that would then be lugged to a dealer to be framed and pitched to customers – a purely commercial endeavor. Instead, it depicted a brilliant bohème, comfortable in his aesthetic studio, awaiting a wealthy patron coming *to him* to retrieve the purchase. Perhaps more than any of the other studio interiors, *Inner Studio* represented Chase's attempt to tread the line between the advertising necessary to sell work and the need to appear purely as an artist, untainted by commercialism.

Media Reception of Studio Interiors

The studio interior paintings were not always well received by the media. In fact, they got little coverage and the coverage they did receive was mixed. Yet, comparing information on how widely Chase exhibited the works with this lukewarm reception in the media, conveys something interesting about the work. The studio paintings were shown widely because they were advertisements to the high society exhibition attendees, not the general public. The audience for this particular Chase spectacle was the potential buyer, not the mass media.

Chase exhibited *The Tenth Street Studio* (Saint Louis Art Museum) in exhibitions during January, February, and March of 1881.[396] In 1882, Chase exhibited *The Inner Studio,*

[395] Chase made the choice to position the main figure with his back to the viewer in several paintings, but this may be the only studio interior with this compositional choice.
[396] Blaugrund, 117. Blaugrund used an alternative title for this painting*, Interior of the Artist's Studio*.

Tenth Street (Huntington Library) and, in 1883, he showed *Studio Interior* (1882, Brooklyn Museum), both at the Society of American Artists' Exhibitions. Other works are harder to follow through the historical record individually, as the paintings are often referred to by alternative titles or just as "a studio interior." However, tracking the paintings through newspapers as a group is just as revealing. For example, the *New York Times* reported on February 7, 1881, "Mr. William M. Chase has a large 'Interior of a Studio' at the present exhibition of the Boston Art Club."[397] A Vermont newspaper published a "Letter from Boston" noting that a "'Studio Interior,' by Wm. Chase, occupies a central place of honor and is very much admired" at the 23rd Annual Exhibition of the Boston Art Club.[398] Also in February 1881, the artists of the Tenth Street Studio Building held an invitation-only private reception for "a leisurely inspection" of the paintings that the artists would then send to the exhibitions of the National Academy of Design and the Society of American Artists.[399] We don't know which studio paintings Chase featured at the reception, but its private nature does reinforce the idea that he was focused on exhibiting to potential patrons, not the general public or mass media. In March 1881, the *New York Times* wrote critically of the studio interior he sent to the Society of American Artists exhibition, which from the newspaper's description we know to be *Tenth Street Studio* (St. Louis Art Museum). The newspaper objected to the bright colors, the abstracted features of the woman lounging on the blue chair, and commented sarcastically on the bric-a-brac and fashionable grey hound, which it found to "assimilates the picture in subject to many favorites of to-day."[400] That is, the *Times* felt this work pandered to the contemporary trend of ostentatious aesthetic display, which, of course, it did.

In 1882, the resident artists repeated the private showing of their paintings at the Tenth Street Studio. The *Weekly Wisconsin* devoted most of a page to describing the event, yet the article barely mentioned the artworks. Instead, it described the contents of Chase's studio at length in much the same way Moran did in his lengthy article from two years earlier. After inventorying each space and giving a physical description of the artist, the

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[397] "Notes of the Fine Arts," *New York Times*, February 7, 1881, 3, accessed August 8, 2020, New York Times Article Archive.
[398] "Letter from Boston," *St. Johnsbury Caledonian* (VT), February 11, 1881, 2, accessed August 8, 2020, Newspapers.com
[399] "Among The Painters, Notes in Galleries and Studios," *New York Tribune*, February 13, 1881, 5, accessed August 8, 2020, Newspapers.com.
[400] "The American Artists, Characteristics of the Present Exhibition," *New York Times*, March 27, 1881, 2, accessed August 8, 2020, New York Times Article Archive.

Weekly Wisconsin noted, "There were few of Mr. Chase's pictures on exhibition," several having been sent out to exhibitions.[401] To one of these exhibitions, hosted by the Society of American Artists, he submitted an unspecified "studio interior."[402] Again, the *New York Times* was unimpressed, reporting that while "Mr. William M. Chase has a large studio interior full of good painting," they were "failing to make much impression."[403] Chase's studio paintings, with subject and background demanding equal attention from the viewer, were not going to win any accolades or awards, nor were they meant to do so. As we've seen, they were advertisements more than they were sincere submissions to the exhibitions. By fall of 1882, he was casting his net more widely. He sent a studio interior to the Tenth Annual Inter-State Exposition of Chicago. The (Chicago) *Inter Ocean* was less critical than the *New York Times*, but still didn't seem to consider the work too seriously, describing it as a "study."[404] The *Inter Ocean* and the *Chicago Tribune* both focused their descriptions of the painting on detailing the contents of the studio, suggesting that this famed aesthetic achievement was still the draw for readers. The *Chicago Tribune* noted significantly that the work had found a buyer.[405]

By 1883, Chase was sending works to foreign exhibitions including a salon in Paris.[406] And he again sent a studio interior to the annual exhibition of the Society of American Artists, this time the one actually titled *Studio Interior* (Brooklyn Museum). Again the work was mostly ignored in press coverage of the exhibition, but it did receive some mild praise from the *New York Times,* which called it a "bright, pleasing work," and the *Baltimore Sun,* which described it as "another example of his supreme cleverness" and "harmoniously brilliant in effect."[407] A *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* critic felt much differently,

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[401] "Our New York Letter, The Artists of the Metropolis," *Weekly Wisconsin* (Milwaukee, WI), March 15, 1882, 8, accessed August 8, 2020, Newspapers.com.
[402] "Gotham Gossip," *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), April 11, 1882, 10, accessed August 8, 2020, Newspapers.com.
[403] "The American Artists," *New York Times,* April 9, 1882, 3, accessed August 8, 2020, New York Times Article Archive.
[404] "To The Exposition, Many Will Go Thither To-night to Attend the Annual Opening," (Chicago) *Inter Ocean*, September 6, 1882, 8, accessed August 8, 2020, Newspaper.com.
[405] "Art in Chicago, Some Reflections as to the Picture-Hanging at the Exposition Galleries," *Chicago Tribune*, October 8, 1882, 22, accessed August 8, 2020, Newspapers.com
[406] "Fine Arts, Gossip from Local and New York Studios and Exhibitions," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 2, 1883, 2, accessed August 8, 2020, Newspapers.com.
[407] "The Society of American Artists," *New York Times*, March 25, 1883, 14, accessed August 8, 2020, New York Times Article Archive; "Society of American Artists," *Baltimore Sun*, March 27, 1883, 5, accessed August 8, 2020, Newspapers.com.

having clearly tired of his gimmicks. The writer delivered a harsh criticism, again describing the works "studies" as opposed to completed formal oil paintings. The *Daily Eagle* reported:

> William M. Chase seems determined the public shall not forget that he paints in an elaborately decorated studio, and he exhibits at the Society another "Studio Interior." The public must be pretty well aware by this time that Chase works in a handsome studio, and now they would like to be let into the secret of what he accomplishes in his handsome apartments. No one denies that Mr. Chase is a good colorist, that he puts plenty of vigor into the handling of color, and that his drawing while sometimes faulty, as in the studio interior at the society, is usually fair; but possessing all these excellent qualities, why does he not put forth pictures instead of studies of studios . . . ?[408]

Another critic writing for the *New York Sun* agreed that the focus on the studio and its contents had grown tiresome, writing of Chase's work exhibited at the 1884 Society of American Artists exhibition:

> They are exploits in the uses of things with decorative intent, in painting of textures because they are textures, in the exploration of still life effects and subtle superficial realism – in fact, they comprise all manner of outer cleverness and imitativeness, but there is no hint in them of anything beneath the surface.[409]

The artist's worst offense, according to the *Sun* critic was that "Mr. Chase ignores his sitter completely." The writer continued:

> Everything is subordinate to the decoration and to the premeditated scheme of color, and a very charming young lady . . . obviously a most exceptional and inspiring subject is obliterated by consideration of bric-a-brac and Japanese commodities.[410]

The *Sun* critic made an important observation. The "charming young lady" was not the subject of the painting. For Chase, the sitter functioned in a particular role amidst the studio – that of linking the artwork to the famous studio and the production of art. Most interestingly, was this observation from the *Brooklyn Eagle*:

> . . . if he does not wish to quietly subside into the limited sphere of portrait painting, it is high time he exhibited something of far more importance than the two works which represent him at the Society this year.[411]

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[408] "Fine Arts, The Sixth Annual Exhibition of the Society of American Artists," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle,* March 31, 1883, 2, accessed August 8, 2020, Newspapers.com.
[409] "The Society of American Artists," (New York) *Sun*, June 1, 1884, 3, accessed August 8, 2020, Newspapers.com
[410] Ibid.
[411] "Fine Arts, The Sixth Annual Exhibition of the Society of American Artists," 2.

Though the writer intended his words as a criticism, this was exactly what Chase was seeking: commissioned portraits. The critic implied that a serious artist should not want to "subside" on such a commercial endeavor, but instead create art for art's sake. Any commercial motivation would sully the innate genius of the bohemian artist. However, as described in previous chapters, American artists, even those who also held teaching and illustrating jobs, needed patrons for a reliable income. While intending to be critical, the *Brooklyn Eagle* writer was simply observant. The studio interiors were intended as advertisements for his availability to create fashionable and aesthetically pleasing portraits.

Fig. 6 William Merritt Chase, *The Connoisseur, The Studio Corner*, ca. 1881, oil on canvas, 20 x 22 in. (50.8 x 55.9 cm.) Gift of Bartlett Arkell, Canajoharie, NY, Arkell Museum at Canajoharie, accessed August 2, 2020, http://www.arkellmuseum.org/american-collections.

***The Connoisseur, The Studio Corner*, Arkell Museum at Canajoharie**

Chase's painting *The Connoisseur* (Arkell Museum) was likely the final studio interior advertisement.[412] With *The Connoisseur*, Chase made a significant shift in his studio interior paintings toward more traditional portraiture.[413] In order to show the role this work played in his progression from studio as subject to studio as background, the painting's date deserves discussion. Several reliable sources have given different dates for the work, but it *is* possible to untangle the knot of contradictions. For example, in her 1995 Library of American Art catalogue of Chase's work, Chase scholar Barbara Gallati dated the painting to approximately 1882.[414] Annette Blaugrund, in her 1997 monograph on the Tenth Street Studio, dated the work 1885.[415] In a 2006 catalogue on Chase's work, Pisano dated the work to 1883.[416] Finally, the owning institution, the Arkell Museum at the Canajoharie currently dates the work to 1881 on its website, but previously dated it to 1885.[417] In short, scholars have assigned the painting to every single year in the period during which Chase was making the studio interior advertisements.

The most reliable way to date *The Connoisseur* may be by comparing it to another Chase work, *Lady in Pink, Portrait of the Artist's Wife* (Santa Barbara Museum of Art).[418] In this 1886 portrait, Chase painted his wife Alice wearing a pale pink and white striped gown adorned with white ruffles at the elbow and collar, a quite recognizable dress. Alice's black hair was pulled back into a full bun at the nape of her neck while a few frizzy flyaways

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[412] William Merritt Chase, *The Connoisseur, The Studio Corner*, circa 1885, oil on canvas, 20 x 22 in. (50.8 x 55.9 cm.) Gift of Bartlett Arkell, New York, Arkell Museum at Canajoharie, accessed August 2, 2020, http://www.arkellmuseum.org/american-collections. See discussion on the date of work in text.

[413] Chase had, of course, been painting portraits his entire career, including during his student years. This statement purely refers to the progression of his studio interiors toward studio portraits, a shift from studio as subject to studio as background. All along, he was also creating separate traditional portraits throughout the studio period.

[414] Gallatti, 51. Gallatti dated the work "1882?"

[415] Blaugrund, 125,

[416] Pisano, *William Merritt Chase, Portraits in Oil*, 49.

[417] The website for the Arkell Museum at Canajoharie currently dates *The Connoisseur* to circa 1881, but secondary works published before 2000 that cite the work at the museum date the work to 1885, presumably drawn from the museum's label at that time.

[418] William Merritt Chase, *Lady in Pink, Portrait of the Artist's Wife,* 1886, oil on canvas, 68 1/2 x 38 3/4 in. (174 x 98.4 cm) California, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, accessed August 2, 2020, http://collections.sbma.net/objects/20814/the-lady-in-pink-portrait-of-the-artists-wife; Pisano, *William Merritt Chase, Portraits in Oil*, 49. *Lady in Pink, Portrait of the Artist's Wife* should not be confused with a later work titled *Portrait of a Lady in Pink*, 1888-1889, Rhode Island School of Design Museum.

framed her porcelain face. In comparing the two works in question, we can see that the subject of this portrait, *Lady in Pink, Portrait of the Artist's Wife*, and the woman in *The Connoisseur* are one and the same. In fact, Chase painted Alice in the exact same dress and hairstyle in both works. This suggests the works were painted in the same period, if not on the same day. Alice Gerson did not become the "Artist's Wife" until 1886.[419] Therefore, we can assume that both works were likely made around this date. Even if they were painted slightly before the wedding, with the title coming later for exhibitions, the two works can be safely dated to circa 1885-1886. This places *The Connoisseur* at the close of Chase's period of studio interiors and demonstrates Chase bridging the gap between studio as subject and background. We know the figure in *The Connoisseur* is Alice by comparing it to the portrait.[420] She is less abstract than the figures in earlier works and *almost* identifiable. Chase's choice of title may have reflected this shift as well. When his subject was the studio scene as a whole, Chase titled the paintings *Tenth Street Studio* or Studio *Interior*. In *The Connoisseur*, he focused on the figure with the studio on background and named the work for her role as patron. While she was still anonymous, she had taken a more prominent position in both the painting's composition and title.[421]

From this work onward, when Chase made paintings depicting the studio, the space simply served as the backdrop to a portrait of a clearly identifiable subject. The figure took up more of the composition and the subjects were no longer anonymous patrons, but known society women, friends, students, or family members.[422] Blaugrund explained, "As

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[419] "Marriages: William Merritt Chase and Alice Gerson," February 8, 1887, *New York, Episcopal Diocese of New York Church Records, 1767-1970*, 286, accessed August 8, 2020, Ancestry.com.

[420] Pisano, *William Merritt Chase: Portraits in Oil*, 49, 126. In a 2018 Facebook post, the Arkell Museum identified the model for *The Connoisseur as* Virginia Gerson, Alice's sister, who also sat for Chase on several occasions. However, comparing the unnamed model in *The Connoisseur with* other portraits of Alice and Virginia where they *are* identified by name, suggests that the unnamed model is Alice. Virginia had more angular features as seen in Chase's other portraits of her, including *Portrait of Virginia Gerson*, ca. 1880 (location unknown, but pictured and cited by Pisano). Alice, had softer features, as shown in *Lady in Pink* (Santa Barbara Museum of Art). The unnamed "connoisseur" could not look more like Alice in the Lady in Pink portrait both in physical features and dress.

[421] The idea that the shift in titles paralleled the shift in focus of the paintings came from historian Nancy Robertson in correspondence regarding this thesis.

[422] Notable exceptions include *In The Studio*, 1892 (Private Collection) and *A Corner of My Studio,* c. 1895 (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco). Chase returned to the studio theme in some degree in all of these works as well as later paintings and pastels created in his Shinnecock studio. These later works were not included in the discussion here because by then, the studio had shifted from focus to background.

time went on, Chase became preoccupied with portrait commissions and other subjects. The Tenth Street Studio was relegated to the background."[423] This was Chase's goal in painting and exhibiting the studio interiors from the beginning and a sign that his advertisements were effective. He used the studio to point back to himself as a popular artist available for commissions. And it worked. By 1885, Chase was reliably in demand for society portraits. But his greatest moment in the studio was yet to come – the painting of the *Carmencita*.

[423] Blaugrund, 120

Fig. 7 William Merritt Chase, *Carmencita*, 1890, oil on canvas, 69 ⅞ x 40 ⅞ in. (177.5 x 103.8 cm) New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed August 2, 2020, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/10465.

CONCLUSION: MASTER OF PUBLICITY TO MASTERPIECES

> "The most tiresome people – and pictures – are the stupidly truthful ones. I really think I prefer a little deviltry."[424] –William Merritt Chase, n.d.

William Merritt Chase remained at the Tenth Street Studio until 1896. During this period, he transformed himself from an eager newcomer desperate for clients to one of the most celebrated artists in the United States. In a parallel development, Chase transformed the images of the women he painted from semi-abstracted figures acting as buyers among the bric-a-brac of the studio interiors into recognizable individuals in boldly painted portraits. This shift was significant because it meant that Chase no longer needed the studio as subject. Curator Elsa Smithgall explained, "The young women who perform[ed] as part of an overall ensemble" in the early to mid-1880s, became the focus of "Chase's celebrated portraits of the following decade."[425] While some of these portraits still included elements of the famed studio – a brightly colored tapestry, an ornate chair, or a gilded frame – the bric-a-brac was relegated to the background. For example, in *A Comfortable Corner* (Parrish Art Museum, 1888), Chase included a blue Turkish rug, a red ottoman, a large brass pot, and a Japanese screen.[426] However, he definitively made the subject of the painting the woman wrapped in a blue kimono, taking up most of the canvas in a comfortable pose on the couch. She held a Japanese fan as well as the viewer's gaze. Chase made her facial features as clear as her role in the artwork. She did not represent the purchase of art or the commercial availability of the artist; she was simply the focus of the painting. The "Japanese patterns and flattened picture plane" also lent a hand in making the studio nothing more than the setting for this portrait.[427] By the late 1880s, Chase didn't need to include the studio for advertising purposes. If he used the lush interior, it was only for the formal elements of texture, color, and the addition of interest to the composition.

In other works from this period, Chase eliminated the studio altogether. In *Portrait of Mrs. C* (Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1893), Chase surrounded his subject with

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[424] Lauderbach, 436.
[425] Elsa Smithgall, "From Rebel to Crusader: William Merritt Chase and the Making of a Modern Master," in *William Merritt Chase: A Modern Master*, 5.
[426] William Merritt Chase, *A Comfortable Corner*, 1888, oil on Canvas, 57 x 44 1/2 in. (144.8 x 113 cm) Water Mill, New York, Parrish Art Museum, accessed August 2, 2020, http://parrishart.org/artist-stories/ - /collection/10575731.
[427] "Catalogue of Works," in *William Merritt Chase: A Modern Master*, 121.

a simple, muted field of black and brown tones.[428] The focus was the beautiful woman in a white shawl positioned in "a shallow space, emptied of all accessories."[429] "Mrs. C" was likely Minnie Clark, one of the original Gibson girls, a perfect example of the "new" American woman, comfortable in the public sphere and in her own skin.[430] In this portrait, Chase painted Clark's eyes so that they met those of the viewer, showcasing her independence and confidence. Like many of his paintings of the "new" woman, *Portrait of Mrs. C* was almost subversive in its positioning of the subject in a traditionally masculine pose.[431] Chase not only transitioned from painting his female subjects as abstracted figures amongst the studio collection to depicting them as clear and distinct individuals, but he made them fiercely challenging to the viewer. Their presence was undeniable and did not go unnoticed. Describing Chase's *Portrait of Mrs. C.*, a *New York Times* reviewer wrote in 1894: "Figure, dress and surroundings are simplicity itself . . . . The brushwork is even and simple . . . never showing a desire to exhibit the painter's cleverness by a bravura passage."[432] In other words, the same newspaper that described his studio interiors as little more than explorations of the aesthetic fad and that complained about his figures' unelaborated features, a decade later remarked of his portrait: "It is a masterpiece."[433] And Chase created that masterpiece with no commercial elements, with no sign of the studio. He had arrived.

By the 1890s, Chase found success at international exhibitions and among New York's art patrons, but he was not above the occasional publicity stunt. After all, his finances were always somewhat precarious even with his unquestioned success. This was due in part to his growing family; he and Alice would have eight children in total.[434] It was also, in part, because he never lost his collecting habit, tendency to buy the works of his students,

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[428] William Merritt Chase, *Portrait of Mrs. C (Lady with a White Shawl),* 1893, oil on canvas, 75 x 52 in. (190.5 x 132.1 cm) Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, accessed August 2, 2020, https://www.pafa.org/museum/collection/item/portrait-mrs-c-lady-white-shawl.
[429] Smithgall, 5.
[430] Erica Hirshler, "Old Masters Meet New Women," in *William Merritt Chase: A Modern Master* (Washington D.C.: Phillips Collection, 2016), 22-25.
[431] Ibid., 25.
[432] "A Dazzling Picture - Show," *New York Times*, March 11, 1894, 17, accessed August 2, 2020, New York Times Article Archive.
[433] Ibid.
[434] Ronald G. Pisano and Alicia Grant Longwell, *Photographs from the William Merritt Chase Archives at the Parrish Art Museum* (Southampton, NY: Parrish Art Museum, 1992), 67.

and love for international travel.[435] Because of these financial pressures, it was still important that he made a splash at exhibitions and maintained the interest of the art press. Even at this more mature stage of his career, this self-publicity ranged from a small stunt to a grand spectacle.

The Exhibition Stunt

Chase executed just such a publicity stunt in 1892 for two reasons: to show off his clever technical skills and garner press coverage that would remind the public that he stood at the forefront of American artists. By 1891, Chase was spending summers teaching at the Shinnecock Hills Summer School of Art in Southampton, then a relatively undeveloped sandy countryside used by vacationing New Yorkers.[436] His family travelled with him, and some of his greatest works from this period depict intimate moments between his wife and children in sunny, natural landscapes.[437] In just such a work, his 1892 painting *The Fairy Tale* (Private Collection), a mother sits with her back to the viewer on a sandy dune, her parasol tossed to one side, her attention focused on her young daughter.[438] The mother and child, dressed in matching pink and white dress clothes, return each other's gaze. The beautifully painted, semi-abstracted landscape is also a portrait of Chase's happy marriage and family life – a subject that delighted him, and one that he turned to often, but not one perhaps that would capture the attention of the press or the New York elite.[439] Thus, Chase painted a second, edgier portrait to accompany the landscape.

In his 1892 painting *An Artist's Wife* (Fayez Sarofilm Collection), Chase depicted Alice seated in front of a painting, her back to the viewer, but turning as if someone just

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[435] "The Collection of William M. Chase," *New York Times*, January 3, 1896, 4, accessed August 2, 2020, New York Times Article Archive; "Magazine Notes," *The Critic: A Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts* 25, January 4, 1896, 13, accessed August 2, 2020, Hathi Trust Digital Library; "In the World of Art," *New York Times*, January 5, 1896, 21, accessed August 2, 2020, New York Times Article Archive; "Pictures by Wm. M. Chase," *New York Times*, March 2, 1887, 4, accessed August 2, 2020, New York Times Article Archive; Roof, 165- 167, 272.
[436] Bryant, 150-52.
[437] Examples include: William Merritt Chase, *At the Seaside*, ca. 1892, oil on canvas, 20 x 34 in. (50.8 x 86.4 cm), New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed August 2, 2020, https://www.metmuseum.org/en/art/collection/search/10464; William Merritt Chase, *Shinnecock Landscape*, ca. 1894, oil on canvas, 16 x 24 inches, Watermill, New York, Parrish Art Museum, August 2, 2020, http://parrishart.org/artist-stories/#/collection/10685623;
[438] William Merritt Chase, *The Fairy Tale*, 1892, oil on canvas, 16 1.2 x 24 in. (41.9 x 61 cm), Private Collection, in Hirshler, 23.
[439] Pisano, *William Merritt Chase: Portraits in Oil*, xii.

called her name.[440] Chase packed the work with symbolism and messages to the viewer. First, he revisited themes from the studio painting advertisements. He depicted the painting behind Alice as surrounded by a gilded frame, the subject of admiration by a studio visitor. In this case, the viewer was the artist's wife, strangely dressed in Dutch costume from an earlier period. This, too, was a deliberate choice by the artist. According to art museum curator Hirshler:

> Here, wearing a white cap and a black dress with a lace collar and cuffs, Alice sits facing away, but she twists around to look at the viewer, her arm looped over the back of her chair in a pose characteristic of multiple portraits of men by [Frans] Hals.[441]

Hirshler specifically compared Chase's portrait of Alice to Frans Hals's portrait *Isaak Abrahamsz Massa* (1626, Art Gallery of Ontario).[442] Chase conveyed a second message in combining this costume with the distinctive pose. The Dutch costume and Hals-like pose were meant to juxtapose this female subject and her confident gaze, with the strong, powerful men depicted by Hals in the same pose. The implication was that this woman was just as bold, self-assured, casually comfortable, and important enough to depict in a formal portrait as were the rich merchants and public figures painted by Hals.[443] Instead of creating a work derivative of Hals or other European masters, Chase used their familiar style to paint the "new woman . . . a distinctly American phenomenon," and one that would have been appealing to the American art public. [444] This portrayal of female strength was a significant development in Chase's work (and fodder for a separate thesis). Chase, however, included another detail in this work solely for the purpose of shameless self-promotion.

The painting within the painting, from which Alice's attention was called away, was none other than the aforementioned Shinnecock landscape *The Fairy Tale*. Chase perfectly repainted the landscape within the composition of the portrait in order to showcase his dexterity and wink at an audience familiar with his penchant for spectacle. Chase then made sure the works were exhibited together. This stunt worked. Writing for *Harper's*, journalist John Gilmer Speed delighted over the works in a lengthy article, though he recognized the

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[440] William Merritt Chase, *An Artist's Wife*, 1892, oil on canvas, 20 ¼ x 16 in. (51.4 x 40.6 cm), Private Collection, in *William Merritt Chase: A Modern Master*, plate 65, p. 167.
[441] Hirshler, 23. Erica Hirshler is the Senior Curator of American Paintings at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.
[442] Ibid., 22-23.
[443] Ibid.
[444] Ibid., 22. For another example of the new American woman, see discussion of *Portrait of Mrs. C* at the beginning of the Conclusion.

pairing of the works as a "scheme" designed to draw attention.[445] Speed wrote that this "picture within a picture . . . would place him among the masters."[446] The *Harper's* writer also intuited that the work would please critics and the general public. He wrote:

> Chase has long been fortunate in being at once a painters' painter and a people's painter, and nothing that he has ever done shows better that he should deserve this dual popularity than the work of which I have just spoken. While the painters will appreciate the technique and wonderful skill of execution, the people will admire the beauty of the picture as a picture, and read aright the plain story that it tells.[447]

Though perhaps the work told a more complex story. Hirshler argued that in this work:

> The composition is actually a double portrait, for Alice is in the act of turning away from a framed painting that she has just been contemplating, of herself sitting with her young daughter Koto in the grassy dunes of Shinnecock . . . . In this way, Alice is simultaneously shown in the diverse roles that relate to her own life and to the contemporary dialogue about women's proper place.[448]

Regardless of interpretation, the painting did indeed grab public interest. Chase exhibited the two paintings together at the 1893 Society of American Artists exhibition and "both were discussed and illustrated in the press."[449] While the work exemplified his continued proclivity for media attention, such a stunt paled in comparison to a spectacle he had engineered only a few years earlier. Chase opened the 1890s, the last decade he would occupy the studio, with a publicity stunt that captured public imagination and drew the eyes of the nation back to Tenth Street.

The Studio Spectacle

In 1890, the chance to capitalize on what was sure to be a publicity-drawing extravaganza fell into Chase's lap. The dancer who called herself Carmencita was available to perform at the famous studio. Chase would not have been able to resist the press that was sure to result from a private performance of the famous dancer or the chance to paint her. The resulting portrait would show just how high Chase had risen in the American art world.

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[445] John Gilmer Speed, "An Artist's Summer Vacation," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 87, no. 517 (June 1893): 3-14, accessed August 2, 2020, Hathi Trust Digital Library. Speed made his comment on the "scheme" on page 6.
[446] Ibid.
[447] Ibid.
[448] Hirshler, 23-24.
[449] Ibid., 23.

By 1890, perhaps no single person encapsulated Gilded Age American ideas about an exotic and forbidden bohemia in the midst of New York better than the Carmencita. Born Carmen Dausset outside of Seville, Spain, in 1868, she was raised by middle-class parents. Her French father, who worked as a linguist, provided for Dausset to begin studying professional dance starting at age seven under a well-known classical ballet instructor in Seville. She began dancing professionally by 1880 and performed in the major cities of Spain and France.[450]

In her quest for celebrity, she set aside Carmen, the girl who had been studying professional dance almost her entire life, and invented Carmencita, a passionate, exotic, and slightly dangerous persona. She told stories about the origin of the Carmencita, implying that she was a sort of Spanish gypsy, that she was untrained in dance, that the wild movements were innate and uncontrollable. Newspapers reported that she could not read, unlikely considering her father's occupation as a linguist, but such tales furthered the image of the raw, sensuous, unpolished persona.[451] Another rumor, repeated in detail in the press, claimed that she learned to dance after being captured by a roaming gang of "brigands."[452] The stories claimed she danced so wonderfully that the robbers allowed her to leave and even gave her money.[453] Carmencita played along with or denied such stories as it suited her.[454] This self-invention eventually brought her success in the United States.

She came to New York in 1889 to dance a small role in a play called *Antiope* at Niblo's Garden on Broadway.[455] The *New York Times* reported, "The dancing of Carmencita is the great attraction of the performance."[456] Despite such praise, the show flopped and she

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[450] M. Elizabeth Boone, *Vistas de España: American Views of Art and Life in Spain, 1860-1914* (New Haven and London, UK: Yale University Press, 2007), 139-144; James Ramirez, *Carmencita: Pearl of Seville* (New York: Press of the Law and Trade Printing Co., 1890), 111-114, accessed August 2, 2020, Library of Congress.
[451] "Dancing Carmencita Can't Read," *New York Times*, May 24, 1890, 8, accessed August 8, 2020, New York Times Article Archive.
[452] "She Danced for the Brigands," *Chicago Tribune*, June 15, 1890, 33, accessed August 8, 2020, Newspapers.com.
[453] Ibid.
[454] Boone, 139-144.
[455] "Theatrical Gossip," *New York Times*, August 27, 1889, 2, accessed August 8, 2020, New York Times Article Archive; Boone, 139-144; Ramirez, 111-114.
[456] "Theatrical Gossip," 2.

left for a tour of the Western states. She returned to New York in February 1890, to dance as a solo act at Koster & Bial's Music Hall, a vaudeville theater on Broadway.[457] She was a hit.

Most media descriptions of her dancing were laden with sexual innuendos of greater and lesser degrees of subtly. In one representative article, the writer described Carmencita's dancing as "untamed," her eyes "dark" and "languishing," her fingers "fluttering," her skin "warm, dusky" and "satiny," her figure "agile, shapely," her motion "intoxicating," and made reference to the "instinct" of her body.[458] These, descriptions, of course, only furthered interested parties' resolve to see the Carmencita. While her allure extended to the upper classes, propriety kept most gentlemen and society women from Koster & Bial's – but not all. One reporter glibly noted, "Some of her admirers feel that their enjoyment of her piquant dancing is increased by the sense that they are doing something naughty in going to the concert hall."[459] By the time she danced at Madison Square Garden, over 6,000 people were vying to get into the theater.[460]

Newspaper articles also indicated the tenuous line between glimpsing bohemia as a spectator, and slipping into impropriety, which was tread by respectable people attempting to see the Spanish dancer. One writer noted that people evaded the question when asked if they had seen the Carmencita, and described Koster & Bial's as "a naughty resort." The writer made sure to report that the society people in the boxes were there only for the dancing and "could not enjoy the naughtiness" of the hall and its "vile odor of beer and cigarettes and the chatter of grisettes from the lower floor."[461] Carmencita was "the talk of the town" and "the idol of the hour," but the perceived "savageness" and "wild recklessness" of her performances were still a real threat to spectators' reputations.[462] For those members of polite society who would not be seen at the beer hall, the alternative was a

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[457] "Display Ad 2," *New York Times*, February 25, 1890, 7, accessed August 8, 2020, New York Times Article Archive; "Display Ad 6," *New York Times*, April 28, 1890, 7, accessed August 8, 2020, New York Times Article Archive; Boone, 139-144; Ramirez, 111-114.
[458] "Both Fair and Famous: Six Women Known the World Over for Their Glorious Beauty," *Jackson Sentinel* (Maquoketa, Iowa), August 14, 1890, 8, accessed August 9, 2020, Newspaper Archive.
[459] "Otero, the Spanish Dancer," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 26, 1890, 12, accessed August 9, 2020, Newspapers.com.
[460] "Carmencita in a Chariot," *Chicago Tribune*, January 31, 1891, 6, accessed August 9, 2020, Newspapers.com.
[461] "Atlanta People," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 28, 1890, 3, accessed August 9, 2020. Grisettes were working-class bohemian women.
[462] Montezuma. "My Note Book." *Art Amateur* 22, no. 6 (May 1890): 112-13, accessed August 2, 2020, JSTOR; "Both Fair and Famous: Six Women Known the World Over for Their Glorious Beauty," 8; "Atlanta People," 3.

private performance. In this practice, New York's elite were following the example of the city's finest artists, those elusive entities allowed to push the limits of propriety.

Carmencita first captured the attention of renowned American painter John Singer Sargent at the 1889 Universal Exposition of Paris. The artist James Carroll Beckwith was reportedly the first to invite the Spanish dancer to perform privately in his studio. On February 27, 1890, Carmencita danced before about twenty of the painter's friends and colleagues, including Sargent. After the party, Beckwith wrote in his diary, "My place was a wreck this morning. The floor of which I am usually so proud was in a frightful condition from the flashes of photographs & the cigar ashes. A smell of stale champagne."[463] While most society people would still not think of inviting Carmencita to perform at their own homes, the artist studio lay at the edge of respectability and bohemia. As long as the elite, and even the artists themselves, expressed the right amount of disapproval and distance, the parties could continue.[464]

After the party at Beckwith's studio, Sargent began a full-length portrait of the dancer, *La Carmencita* (Metropolitan Museum of Art).[465] In her work *Dance and American Art*, historian Sharyn R. Udall explained that American artists looked to Spanish dance subjects for a "deliberate sensuousness" impossible to express through American subject matter.[466] She continued, "Spanish dance, more than most other kinds, seemed capable of encompassing life's primal acts: of love, loss, tragedy, compensation."[467] John Singer Sargent had found great success in the early 1880s with just such subject matter, especially his brilliant *El Jaleo* (Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum) in which he captured the passion and energy of a Spanish dancer, her twirling skirts and stomping feet dramatically lit against a

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[463] Pisano, *Portraits in Oil*, 90-91. Pisano cites James Carroll Beckwith, Diary, April 1, 1890, National Academy of Design, New York.
[464] Boone, 140. Boone notes that Beckwith was "careful to express a proper degree of disapproval at hosting a night with the Spanish dancer."
[465] John Singer Sargent, *La Carmencita*, 1890, oil on canvas, 91 5/16 × 55 7/8 in. (232 × 142 cm) New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, (Lent by Paris, Musée d'Orsay), accessed August 2, 2020, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/21453; Ramirez, 135. Sargent's *Carmencita* is in the permanent collection of the Musée d'Orsay in Paris but was loaned to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 2015 where it was diplayed in conversation with Chase's *Carmencita*.
[466] Udall, 116.
[467] Ibid.

dark backdrop that included a group of intense musicians, and a glimpse of a wild and uncontrolled audience at the edge of the frame.[468]

While Sargent was returning to the subject of Spanish dance with his portrait of the Carmencita, the wealthy and motivated Boston art collector Isabella Stewart Gardner was attempting to buy *El Jaleo* from its current owner. She was eventually successful, but at the time, the earlier work was unavailable for purchase. Sargent was probably hoping he could sell her *La Carmencita* instead. Propriety forbade his asking her to come to New York from Boston only to attempt to sell her a painting. Fortunately, Gardner expressed interest in coming to New York to see the dancer herself, and Sargent's opportunity was ripe. Sargent felt his studio was too small and dimly lit to create an impressive atmosphere for the performance, so he contacted Chase about the use of his Tenth Street Studio space. Sargent was also aware of needing a place that matched the social standing of Gardner, as the performance would take place on the fringes of bohemia.[469] Sargent wrote Chase:

> My Dear Chase,
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> Mrs. Jack Gardiner [sic] whom I daresay you know, writes me that she must see the Carmencita and asks me to write her to dance for her some day next week and she will come up from Boston, but my studio is impossible. The gas man tells me that he cannot bring more light into the studio than the two little jets that are there.
> Would you be willing to lend your studio for the purpose and be our host for Tuesday night or Thursday of next week? We would each of us invite some friends and Mrs. Gardiner would provide the Carmencita and I the supper and whatever other expenses there might be. I only venture to propose this as I think there is some chance of your enjoying the idea and because your studio would be such a stunning place. If you don't like the idea or if it would be a great inconvenience speak up and pardon my cheek! Send me an answer by bearer if you can, if not, to the Clarendon soon, as I must write to Mrs. Gardiner.
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> Yours Sincerely,
> John Sargent.[470]

Gardner actually owned a New York home on Fifth Avenue, but it is clear that this location was never an option for the event, reinforcing the fact that she was treading the

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[468] John Singer Sargent, *El Jaleo*, 1882, oil on canvas, 232 x 348 cm. (91 5/16 x 137 in.) Boston, Massachusetts, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, accessed August 2, 2020, https://www.gardnermuseum.org/experience/collection/13259.
[469] Boone, 141-2. Boone wrote that Sargent picked the elaborate Tenth Street Studio because he was being "sensitive to the social standing of his patron."
[470] John Singer Sargent to William Merritt Chase, February 1890, in Roof, 156

line of acceptability. Instead, the party occurred April 1, 1890, at Chase's Tenth Street Studio, and according to Beckwith who was in attendance, it "did not go well." The small audience was a mix of "a few select friends" of Chase, Sargent, and Gardner.[471] Beckwith explained that the audience was "stiffish," with the wealthy Boston guests not mingling with the artists and their New York friends. The Carmencita appeared at 11:30 p.m. after finishing her show at Koster and Bial's. According to Rosina Emmett Sherwood, a painter and student of Chase's, "Sargent and Chase made her rub the make-up off her face, and brushed her frizzed hair back from her forehead."[472] Apparently, Carmencita took poorly to being managed and her mood turned sour. Some sources claimed that Carmencita offended Gardner by throwing a rose in her face.[473] Other sources claimed Gardner was jealous of the attention Sargent paid to Carmencita.[474] At some point, Gardner must have begun to enjoy herself as she performed a small dance of her own. According to historian M. Elizabeth Boone in *Vistas de Espana*, "the transgressive nature of the evening – for Gardner to perform her own Spanish dance went well beyond the class and gender boundaries placed on women of her stature."[475] The New York gossip tabloid, *Town Topics* wrote about the events at Tenth Street:

> On a stage, the torsal shivers and upheavals indulged in by Carmencita might be allowed to pass for art, but in the privacy of a richly furnished room, with innocent eyes to view her, nothing but the fatal earthiness of the woman's performance could make any impression.[476]

Boone noted that by "removing the physical separation between the dancer and audience maintained by the stage at Koster and Bial's," Gardner had opened herself up for such criticism.[477] Gardner's name was dragged through the mud, Sargent failed to sell his painting, and Chase recognized an opportunity.

The idea of Carmencita performing in a smoky private studio late in the evening had already captured the attention of the media. She was, essentially, "a human pseudo-event" guaranteed to bring public attention wherever she appeared.[478] Chase could not resist the

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[471] Bryant, 125.
[472] Roof, 157-158.
[473] Boone, 143.
[474] Bryant, 125.
[475] Boone, 143.
[476] Ibid. Boone cited "Saunterings," Town Topics 23 (April 3, 1890): 2.
[477] Ibid.
[478] Boorstin, 9. Boorstin's pseudo-event is discussed in the "Cultural Theory" section of Chapter One of this thesis.

opportunity to capitalize on this public interest. Chase persuaded Carmencita to return to his studio for a private performance on April 24, 1890. Chase did a much better job than Sargent had done at assembling an audience and creating a lively and artistic atmosphere to both flatter and tease the best performance out of Carmencita. Chase invited seventy-five people, probably a more pleasing number to the dancer who thrived in front of large crowd, a mix of artists, art students, friends, and writers. Chase took the opportunity to paint his own interpretation of the dancer, despite the fact that one of the guests was Sargent who was still hoping to sell his painting of the dancer to Stewart. While Sargent had focused on the beauty of the dancer and her costume, perhaps drawing too much attention to the latter, Chase highlighted all the qualities that had made Carmencita a sensation: her confidence, energy, sensuality, and bold stage presence. While Chase biographer Keith Bryant claimed that Chase's portrait was not intended to compete with Sargent's, this seems unlikely. Chase, who greatly respected Sargent, must have seen that Sargent's portrait of Carmencita did not capture the passion of Spanish dance the way that his earlier work *El Jaleo* did.[479] Chase's portrait, in contrast, captured exactly what Sargent's lacked, the carefully crafted persona that made Carmencita a star. In her quest for celebrity, she set aside her birth name of Carmen Dausset and denied her upper-middle class upbringing and classical ballet training. In place of Carmen she invented Carmencita, a passionate, exotic, and slightly dangerous spectacle. She created new stories about her origins, claiming that she was untrained in dance and that the wild movements she brought to the stage were innate and uncontrollable. She told reporters that she could not read, unlikely considering her father's occupation as a linguist.[480] Another rumor, repeated in detailed stories in the press, was that she learned to dance when she was captured by a roaming gang of brigands. She claimed to have danced so wonderfully that her captors gave her freedom and even money.[481] Carmencita played along with or denied such stories as it suited her.[482] Of course, self-consciously creating a public persona was something that Chase understood and appreciated. He was the right artist for the job. Chase and the dancer also seemed to have gotten along much better than she and Sargent, perhaps due to their like-mindedness. Carmencita even sent Chase's wife (who could not attend the performance) her slipper as a

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[479] Bryant, 126.
[480] "Dancing Carmencita Can't Read," *New York Times*, May 24, 1890, 8, accessed February 21, 2021, New York Times Article Archive.
[481] "She Danced for the Brigands," *Chicago Tribune*, June 15, 1890, 33, accessed February 21, 2021, Newspapers.com.
[482] Boone, 139-144.

gesture of appreciation.[483] Sargent knew that Chase had stolen the show. He was disappointed in his own portrait and later described it as "little more than a sketch."[484] While Sargent recognized before Chase that Carmencita was the ideal subject for a portrait, perhaps one that would bring the rave reviews that followed *El Jaleo*, he failed to capture her spirit. Udall explained:

> Chase's portrait of the Spanish dancer exudes a confident liveliness achieved in part by the painter's broad, dashing brushstroke. It is a showy tour de force with roots in Velázquez, Manet, and the Impressionists, from whom Chase learned a directness and spontaneity perfectly congruent with Carmencita's flashy presentation and missing from Sargent's portrait.[485]

Chase immediately found a buyer for his *Carmencita*. By 1894, it was displayed at the American Art Galleries, and today hangs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.[486]

Most significantly, Chase's painting of Carmencita represented the evolution of his relationship to the Tenth Street Studio. Mainly, he no longer needed it for publicity. According to *Scribner's* magazine, the section of the studio where Carmencita danced was the wall with the burgundy tapestry and stuffed swan that he had painted in *Tenth Street Studio* (Carnegie Museum).[487] In this painted advertisement, Chase detailed the contrasting textures, patterns, and colors of the fabrics, surfaces, objects, and artworks adorning the space. In his painting of Carmencita, executed in that same space, he obliterated all traces of Tenth Street bric-a-brac. He tamed his color palette and gave his subject a muted brown backdrop. The focus was the personality of the dancer in a portrait that captured her very essence. In many ways, the Carmencita painting represented everything that made the studio famous: the bohemian atmosphere situated on the edge of impropriety with just enough cosmopolitan allure to make it irresistible to upper-class patrons. But because the

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[483] Roof, 157. It is possible that Alice did not attend because of the slightly scandalous nature of the evening, but we shouldn't assume she did not approve of the opportunity it afforded Chase. Since Alice aided Roof in providing much of the information and the primary sources for Roof's biography, it's unlikely that Roof would have included this anecdote without consulting Alice.

[484] Gary Tinterow, *Manet / Velázquez: The French Taste for Spanish Painting* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2003), 536. Tinterow cited a letter from Sargent to Julia Heyneman.

[485] Udall, 119.

[486] William Merritt Chase, *Carmencita*, 1890, oil on canvas, 69 7/8 x 40 7/8 in. (177.5 x 103.8 cm) New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed August 2, 2020, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/10465.

[487] Gifford Beal, "The Field of Art," *Scribner's Magazine*, 61 (February 1917): 258, accessed August 2, 2020, Hathi Trust Digital Library.

press already linked Carmencita to the studio, and in turn to Chase, he didn't need the bric-a-brac in the composition. The artist was linked so thoroughly with the studio in the public's mind, he no longer needed it to appear in his artwork. He encompassed all of the connotations of the studio within his own celebrity.

Chase could, by this point in his career, exhibit a painting that cheekily referred back to another of his works and have confidence that his audience was with him on the joke. Or he could confidently obliterate all signs of the famous studio and rest assured that an art public would immediately recall the Carmencita affair as if they themselves had been at the Tenth Street Studio. But the exhibition stunt of the painting within a painting and the studio spectacle of the night with Carmencita were simply boosts to his established celebrity and pocketbook. He no longer needed to angle for coverage; he was a celebrity.

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Success through Celebrity: A Summary

Through serendipity and ambition, the artist arrived in the time and place that best suited him, because William Merritt Chase and New York's Gilded Age were perfectly matched. Nineteenth-century Americans wishing for an escape from the realities of industrialization, immigration, and the increased anonymity of secular, urban life, turned their search for meaningful cultural experiences inward. An increasingly literate public with more leisure time hungered not for stories of great men achieving lasting fame through heroic deeds, but of colorful characters distinguishing themselves from the masses through their unique personalities, regardless of occupation or achievement. The Gilded Age produced a treasure trove of such personalities including masters of self-promotion such as Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, Oscar Wilde, and James Abbott McNeill Whistler. These men were able to create art that referenced themselves, reiterating their celebrity to their audience. They were also able to capitalize on the incredible popularity of the Aesthetic Movement. By the time the young Hoosier-born painter William Merritt Chase was finishing his studies in Munich, the Aesthetic Movement had swept through American society. For many, including New York's art-buying elite, this ascendancy of aesthetics meant that social status and public identity were dependent on the accumulation of art objects of all kinds. And nothing projected the principles of the Aesthetic Age more perfectly than the artfully arranged interior. Here Chase identified an unlikely path to celebrity, the perfect studio.

While Chase had worked hard at the Munich Royal Academy, improved as an artist, and received some small notice in New York newspapers by the late 1870s, he had not achieved enough attention or patronage to make a comfortable living. By investing in the grandest studio available upon his arrival in New York in 1878, he was gambling on the power of spectacle to attract press attention. It worked. Instead of getting brief, one-line mentions in the art scene summaries printed in newspapers, his studio procured long feature articles in those newspapers, art journals, and popular magazines. Following the lead of an early and exhaustive article in the *Art Journal* by John Moran, these articles made Chase's studio a magical bohemia in the minds of the public, one existing in a permeable borderland between respectable society and the slightly scandalous world of artists. Moran's article also established the idea, picked up by other writers, that the studio represented Chase's genius manifested in physical form. The problem was, people initially wanted to see the studio more than they wanted to patronize the artist. Chase needed to make the press interested in his paintings if he were to survive in a competitive occupation. He did so first by creating spectacle and then brilliantly subtly painted advertisements.

Chase eventually joined several professional art organizations that brought him respectability, opportunities for exhibition, and important contacts with other artists. But first, Chase joined the new and slightly roguish Tile Club, a group that thoroughly recognized the power of selling the aesthetic craze back to the consumer, albeit not without some sarcastic criticism of the unreserved consumerism of it all. This choice seemed questionable on one hand, seeing that the group employed a level of anonymity in its presentation to the outside world. On the other hand, the club trips, sponsored by major journals and thus practically guaranteed publication, provided a platform for Chase to stage a spectacle. Recognizing that the public was more interested in the studio than his artwork, Chase simply took the contents of the studio with him on one aquatic Tile Club adventure. The resulting lengthy article was full of descriptions of Tenth Street bric-a-brac, creating a feature that pointed back to Chase himself. While he was still represented entirely by the studio contents, as opposed to his own marketable artwork, this creation of a product that referenced the celebrity he had already achieved through the studio was a major step towards his ultimate self-promotional achievement, the studio advertisements.

By the 1880s, the Tenth Street Studio had achieved widespread celebrity. Chase had also achieved celebrity, but as the creator of the studio more than as a painter. Being famous for having created an enchanted studio did not pay the bills; Chase needed to sell artwork.

By painting pictures of the studio itself, his best-known creation, he advertised himself as its creator and through the medium, that is, the artfully crafted painting, he also advertised himself as an artist available for hire. This was a brilliant and unprecedented marketing move for one main reason. It circumvented other more obvious commercial appeals that would have harmed his reputation because of Gilded Age ideas about the pure motivations and otherworldly genius of artists. These ideas were precious commodities as well. Chase needed to maintain his bohemian allure while marketing his work. Thus, he had to keep his commercial intent sublimated in beautiful artworks. In several paintings, most with variation on the title *Tenth Street Studio* or *In the Studio*, he tread the line between appealing to patrons' lavish taste and the overtly commercial. The studio advertisements contained elements in the composition – depictions of brushes, art prints, and the artist himself – to remind the viewer of the man behind the studio. They also contained elements of the commercial – framed artworks ready to be claimed by new owners, famous models on break from their sittings, and even patrons examining works on the walls.

Unsurprisingly, this was not an easy line to walk and the reception of these works in the press was mixed. By 1885, however, a skeptical press no longer mattered. The advertising had worked, and Chase was in demand. He could relegate the studio to the background of portraits, or paint it out altogether, as he did in his painting of the Carmencita. He made a bold gamble and succeeded. We wouldn't know him if he had not. Perhaps nothing attests to his success better than the permanent display in Gallery 766 of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's American Wing. There, the dancer in the painting stares down at the viewer with her slightly haughty, knowing smile – an example of some of the finest Gilded Age American art and one of the most brilliant marketing strategies to date. The paintings Chase made of his Tenth Street Studio were little more than advertisements, but they carefully negotiated the complex Gilded Age world that wanted him to be both genius bohème and cosmopolitan gentleman. For Chase, producing them was perhaps a necessary evil that allowed him to create masterpieces such as the *Carmencita*. Chase explained it best himself: "I will venture the remark; that no matter what you do, so long as you succeed in what you do, you will be forgiven."[488] Through his talent, advertising genius,

[488] Pisano, *William Merritt Chase*, 30. Pisano cited William M. Chase, "Talk Presented at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York" January 15, 1916, manuscript published in A. Milgrome, "The Art of William Merritt Chase" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1969), 106-124.

"and a little deviltry," William Merritt Chase indeed succeeded at becoming one of the most acclaimed American artists of the Gilded Age.[489]

[489] Lauderbach, 436.

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PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

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PUBLICATIONS

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AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS

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